THE ORIGIN OF PUBLIC SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR BLACKS IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA, 1917 TO 1927

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY

LINDA GAIL HOUSCH COLLINS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

MAY 1979

Abstract

History

Collins, Linda Gail Housch B.A. Spelman College, 1968

The Origin of Public Secondary Education for Black in Atlanta, Georgia, 1917 to 1927

Advisor: Dr. Margaret N. Rowley

Thesis Dated May 1979

The fight to establish tax-supported secondary education for Blacks in Georgia was an uphill struggle that began in most parts of the state in the 1930s. Booker T. Washington Junior-Senior High School of Atlanta, which opened in 1924, was one of the earliest public high schools for Blacks in the state. Although it was one of the first public high schools for Blacks in Georgia, it lagged fifty-two years behind the opening of the first tax-supported high schools for Whites in Atlanta. Black Atlantans were without a public high school for over one-half a century because of the social, political and educational constraints on their lives in the decades between the 1870s and 1920s. In a strategic effort to resist their educational oppression, Black Atlantans united politically between 1917 and 1921 to bring about the creation of the city's first Black public high school.

This thesis encompasses a decade of struggle. It analyzes the political forces that laid the groundwork for the school beginning in 1917 and extends its study up to 1927 when the high

school had its first graduating class.

Chapters I and II give a general background about Black life in Georgia and in Atlanta with respect to politics, race relations, and secondary education between 1890 and 1930. These chapters provide a general state-wide orientation to the study of the emergence of Black public secondary education in Georgia's largest city. Chapter III retraces and analyzes the political fight that created the high school between 1917 and 1923. Chapter IV extends the study through the first three formative years of the school's existence. Chapter IV also gives particular attention to a comparative study of the growth of Black and White public secondary education from 1923 to 1927. The primary sources used for this thesis include the Atlanta Board of Education Minutes from 1917 to 1927 and other related sources.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Dr. Margaret Rowley and Dr. Alexa Henderson for their comments and creative criticism during the writing of this paper. Mr. Walter Bell of the Atlanta Board of Education was most helpful in making materials available from the Atlanta Public School System's Archives. Finally, the author wishes to thank Miss Noelle Black and Mr. Francis C. Collins for their kindness and constant encouragement during the writing of this paper.

L. G. H. C.

March 1979

INTRODUCTION

The fight to establish tax-supported secondary education for Blacks in Georgia was an uphill struggle that began in most parts of the state in the 1930s. Booker T. Washington Junior-Senior High School of Atlanta, which opened in 1924, was one of the earliest public high schools for Blacks in the state. Although it was one of the first public high schools for Blacks in Georgia, it lagged fifty-two years behind the opening of the first tax-supported high schools for Whites in Atlanta. Black Atlantans were without a public high school for over one-half a century because of the social, political and educational constraints on their lives in the decades between the 1870s and 1920s. In a strategic effort to resist their educational oppression, Black Atlantans united politically between 1917 and 1921 to bring about the creation of the city's first Black public high school.

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CHAPTER I

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS ON BLACK LIFE IN GEORGIA AND IN ATLANTA FROM 1890 TO 1920

The environment in which Black Georgians lived from 1890 to 1920 was largely shaped by racial discrimination and terrorism, and the Black response to these conditions of life. Racial discrimination saturated all areas of social and political life among Blacks. The day-to-day constraints on their lives created the 1917 setting for the fight that led to the establishment of Atlanta's first Black public high school.

During these thirty years, social constraints imposed on Black life in Georgia were nurtured in the womb of a separatist philosophy. The code of segregation of the races was based on the philosophy of the superiority of the White race and the inferiority of the formerly enslaved Black race. Henry W. Grady, a prominent Atlantan, was the editor of the city's widely read Atlanta Constitution and also the spokesman of the New South movement. He voiced the philosophy of White supremacy in a speech in Dallas, Texas in 1887:

> The supremacy of the White race of the South must be maintained forever, and the domination of the Negro race resisted at all points and at all hazards - because the White race is the superior race. This is the declaration of no new truth. It has abided forever

> in the marrow of our bones, and shall run forever with the blood that feeds Anglo-Saxon hearts.[1]

Less than a decade later, a young Black Alabama man rose to national prominence by making a speech in Atlanta in 1895 that accepted the inherent assumptions behind social segregation. Booker T. Washington's famous "Atlanta Compromise" speech endorsed separation of the races in all socially related matters and unity of the races in economic matters.[2] With the rise of Booker T. Washington as the main spokesman of the Black race, White and Black leadership seemed to endorse segregation and White supremacy as an acceptable life style.

The segregationist philosophy sanctioned the institutionalization of a series of laws that were designed to keep the "inferior" and "superior" races apart in all social dimensions of life: in schools, churches, restaurants, theatres, hospitals, hotels, cemetaries, trains, streetcars, parks, residential areas, factories, and even in elevators.[3] The public accommodations that were available to Blacks were poorly financed, poorly maintained, and inferior to those available to Whites. An example of poor and inadequate public facilities for Blacks was found in the conditions of the Black public elementary schools of Atlanta. The journalist, Ray Stannard Baker, visited Atlanta in 1906 after a race riot and made the following assessment of the Black schools:

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[1] Thomas F. Gossett, Race: The History of an Idea in America (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 264.

[2] Horace Mann Bond, The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1934), p. 116.

[3] Benjamin E. Mays, Born to Rebel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), pp. 72, 76, 79, 83.

> . . . the Negro is neglected. Several new schools have been built for white children, but there has been no new school for coloured children in fifteen or twenty years. . . . The president of the board of education . . . calls attention to . . . "the . . . Negro schools, . . . their overcrowded conditions. In every Negro school many teachers teach two sets of pupils, each set for one half of a school day."[4]

The concept of separate and unequal was the accepted lifestyle in race relations in Georgia and in the South.

Atlanta was not only the home of Henry W. Grady's New South philosophy, it was also the birthplace of the revitalized Ku Klux Klan in 1915. The mission of this organization was to employ terrorist tactics in order to protect the myth of White Protestant superiority. The Klan was so large in numbers in Atlanta that the city was labeled the "Imperial City" of the Ku Klux Klan.[5]

In addition to being labeled inferior and being made the recipients of poor and inadequate public accommodations, Black Georgians were also the recipients of a number of violent attacks. From 1890 to 1920, lynchings of Blacks became a way of life - and death - in Georgia. Tom Watson, an early twentieth century Georgia spokesman for the New South, sanctioned the virtue of lynchings in the following manner:

> [The Negro has] no comprehension of virtue, honesty, truth, gratitude and principle. [The South had] to lynch him occasionally, and flog him, now and then, to keep him from blaspheming the Almighty, by his conduct, on account of his smell and his color.

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[4]Ray Stannard Baker, Following the Color Line (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 52-53.

[5]Blaine A. Brownell, ed., The City In Southern History (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1977), p. 147.

> [Lynching was] a good sign; [it showed] that a sense of justice yet lives among the people.[6]

Whites throughout Georgia accepted lynchings as a means of social control and domination over Blacks. From 1909 to 1918, Georgia led the nation as the state with the highest number of lynchings. During these years 128 persons were lynched in Georgia, 122 of whom were Black men and women.[7]

In the single year of 1918, sixty-three Black men and women were lynched throughout the United States. Out of this number, the State of Georgia claimed nineteen, or 30 percent of the total number of lynchings throughout the nation.[8] The motives behind lynchings varied from being accused of threatening to sue a White man, attempting to register to vote, being disrespectful to a White man, inflicting bodily harm to a White man or woman, or sometimes no discernable reason at all. Mary Turner, a Black Georgian who was almost at the point of childbirth, was hanged and burned because she threatened to disclose the names of the men who had killed her husband.[9] Once W. E. B. DuBois described seeing the fingers of a Black person who had been lynched. The fingers were on display in the windows of a butcher shop in Atlanta.[10]

Terrorism also took the form of race riots in Georgia towns and cities. Statesboro, Georgia was the scene of anti-Black mob violence in 1904, and Atlanta was the scene of a major race riot in 1906.

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[6]Gossett, Race, p. 271.

[7]National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918 (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), pp. 4,60-61,62.

[8]Ibid., pp. 104-105. [9]Gossett, Race, p. 270. [10]Ibid., pp. 270-271.

In both riots, Blacks were attacked and killed.[11]

Blacks not only lived under social constraints, but under political constraints as well. Denial of the Black voting right emerged strongly in the 1890s and was based upon the White supremist philosophy. In the 1890s, the Democratic Party rose to become the single party of the solid White South. The party built its power base around discrimination in favor of Whites and against Blacks. However, as late as 1888, the Black vote in Atlanta still had some bargaining power in Democratic primaries. For example, a Democratic candidate in the city election of 1888 gave support to several demands by Blacks, including the promise of four seats on the Board of Education, in exchange for the Black vote. Toward the end of the campaign, the candidate became evasive about his commitment to the Black demands. Consequently, the Black leadership shifted its support to the other candidate who won the election.[12] After the city's political campaign of 1891, Atlanta's Democratic Executive Committee adopted the use of the "white primary" for the city election of 1892.[13] This strategy meant the exclusion of Black voters from the Democratic Party's primaries from that point on. In 1897, the same committee readopted the white primary on the grounds that "Negro participation corrupted local politics."[14] Since there was no significant opposition in the primaries from any other party, the candidates of the Democratic Party ran unopposed in the general elections

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[11]John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), pp. 323-324.

[12]C. A. Bacote, "The Negro in Atlanta Politics," Phylon XVI (Fourth Quarter, 1955):335-336.

[13]Ibid., p. 337. [14]Ibid., p. 339.

where they always came out victorious.[15]

A variety of obstacles were also used to discourage Black voter participation in general, open, and special elections. The State of Georgia adopted a new constitution in 1877 that provided for a cumulative poll tax and more rigid enforcement of residential requirements in order to register to vote. This device served to reduce not only Black voter participation, but White voter participation as well.[16] By 1906, the political practices of the poll tax, the white primary and race-baiting among gubernatorial candidates caused Black Atlantans to be almost completely discouraged from participation in politics. In 1908, Georgia legislators followed the pervasive pattern of other Southern states and disfranchised Blacks, effective on January 1, 1909. However, in spite of all of the above obstacles, Blacks who had an intense determination could still vote in general, open, and special elections.[17] An example of Black determination to vote in spite of inherent obstacles was Atlanta's general school bond election of 1919. Blacks registered to vote in sufficient numbers in order to boycott the election. This strategy led to the defeat of the school bond issue of 1919 and laid the political groundwork for successfully demanding a Black public high school in the 1921 bond election.[18]

In response to social discrimination, political disfranchisement,

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[15]Howard Lawrence Preston, "The Georgia Gubernatorial Campaign and Democratic Primary Election of 1946" (M.A. thesis, Atlanta University 1971), p. 9.

[16]Bacote, "The Negro In Atlanta Politics," p. 333.

[17]Ibid., pp. 341-342.

[18]Further discussion of these pivotal elections is found in Chapter III.

and violent terrorism, Blacks in the United States became involved in a number of protest movements. By 1920, they were involved in legal, economic, educational, and social battles through a variety of organizations. Examples were the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.) and the National Urban League. The Marcus Garvey movement and the Great Migration from the South to Northern cities also constituted protest movements.[19]

The N.A.A.C.P., which was biracially organized in 1908, was particularly strong in its fight to thwart lynchings and political disfranchisement. In 1919 the Association worked vigorously toward the passage of a federal anti-lynch law. Among its strategies was the publication of full-page anti-lynch advertisements in leading newspapers as the New York Times and the Atlanta Constitution. However, the passage of an anti-lynch law never reached fruition in Congress. The N.A.A.C.P. also fought legal battles in courts in its effort to attack disfranchisement and segregation.[20]

The City of Atlanta was the birthplace and home of another interracial organization called the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (C.I.C.) in 1919. This organization condemned discrimination against Blacks, but unlike the N.A.A.C.P., it did not attack segregation. From its Atlanta base, the Commission spoke out on a number of Southern problems, particularly in the areas of equalizing educational, health, welfare, and agricultural services to Blacks.[21]

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[19]August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, From Plantation to Ghetto (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), pp. 222,224,226,231.

[20]Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, pp. 362-363.

[21]Ibid., p. 364.

Organizations like the N.A.A.C.P. and the C.I.C. benefited many Blacks. However, the leadership of these groups was in the hands of a very small minority of Black and White middle class leaders. The response of a large percentage of the Black masses to the social, political and economic injustices in their lives was to migrate to Southern and Northern urban cities. Between 1900 and 1920 at least one half million Blacks migrated from the South to the North.[22] During these two decades, Atlanta played the dual roles of being a recipient and sender of thousands of Blacks. When one Black man was asked why he was leaving the city for Washington, D. C. after a racial disturbance in Atlanta in 1908, the man said he wanted to be as near the American flag as he could get.[23] During the 1920s, the states of Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia suffered net losses of Blacks.[24] According to the United States Census figures, Blacks declined from 39.7 percent of the total Atlanta population in 1900 to 31.2 percent by 1920.[25] Part of this decrease was due to an increase in White migration into Atlanta. But there was also a greater emigration than immigration of Blacks from Atlanta.

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[22]Florette Henri, Black Migration: Movement North, 1900-1920 (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1976), p. 51.

[23]Ibid., pp. 52-53.

[24]Blaine A. Brownell, ed., The City in Southern History, p. 137.

[25]Timothy James Crimmins, "The Crystal Stair: A Study of the Effects of Class, Race and Ethnicity on Secondary Education in Atlanta, 1872-1925" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1972), p. 163.

Discrimination, segregation, terrorism, educational inequality, political disfranchisement, and a White supremist philosophy were some of the constraints on Black life in the New South from 1890 to 1920. All of these constraints existed in the state of Georgia and in its largest city, Atlanta, during this time period. Blacks responded to the constraints and injustices in their lives through a variety of national protest movements. It was the decision to unite politically and to challenge the educational injustices that netted Black Atlantans an important political victory in 1919. Another political victory came in 1921 and produced the commitment to build the city's first tax-supported secondary school for Blacks.

CHAPTER II

THE STATUS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR BLACKS IN GEORGIA AND IN ATLANTA FROM 1900 TO 1930

A study of the breakthrough in public secondary education for Blacks in Atlanta is more thoroughly understood when placed against the background of the state and regional educational policy from 1900 to 1930. The City of Atlanta followed the general state-wide trend of offering no tax-supported high school opportunities for Blacks. It was in the 1930s when most Georgia school systems began to accept a serious commitment to financially support Black secondary education. The Atlanta Public School System made a commitment to build a Black high school prior to the 1930s because Blacks politically challenged the school system and won a strategic victory in 1919 and 1921.

Although Atlanta had within its boundaries five private Black high schools for those who could afford to pay, the city followed the typical pattern of other Georgia cities, towns, and rural communities in denying free secondary education to the Black masses. The following sketch gives a general background of the status of Black secondary education in the South, in Georgia, and in Atlanta up to 1930.

The public school systems of the South were among the major bastions of the code of separate and unequal treatment toward Blacks. A frail system of public elementary education existed for Blacks basically in the cities and towns of the South and less so in the rural

counties. Black public secondary education was practically non-existent at the turn of the century. Although Blacks were 32 percent of the population in ten Southern states by 1900, they were only 5 percent of all high school students in those states. Translated into raw figures, this meant that 2,659 Blacks were enrolled in Southern public high schools compared to 49,203 Whites.[1]

In 1915, ten Southern states reported 6,239 Blacks in high school and 147,163 Whites.[2] This was a ratio of 4 percent Black and 96 percent White. By 1920, the number of Black public high school students had risen to 8,585, while the number of White public high school students had risen to 412,061.[3] Thus, by 1920, the raw figures of Blacks in high school had increased, but the ratio of Blacks to Whites had dropped to 2 percent of the total high school figure.

So bleak was the status of Black public education in the South around the turn of the century that W. E. B. DuBois commented that "Negro education has never really been tried in the South."[4] DuBois also claimed that one of the main reasons behind the political disfranchisement of Georgia's Blacks in 1908 was to decrease Negro school appropriations. The governor of Georgia in 1917, Hugh M. Dorsey, was even moved

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[1]Horace Mann Bond, The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1934), pp. 206-195.

[2]Edgar A. Toppin, "Walter White and the Atlanta N.A.A.C.P.'s Fight for Equal Schools, 1916-1917," History of Education Quarterly 7 (1967):5.

[3]Bond, The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order, p. 206.

[4]Toppin, "Walter White and the Atlanta N.A.A.C.P.'s Fight for Equal Schools, 1916-1917," p. 17.

to address the Georgia Assembly regarding the need to improve Black education. He said that although Blacks were 45 percent of Georgia's population at that time, they received only 3½ percent of the state's school funds.[5] An example of disproportionate allocations of school appropriations was in the area of teachers' salaries in 1917. Black public school teachers in Georgia averaged $32.42 a month while White teachers averaged $69.78 a month.[6]

Public secondary education for Blacks was very slow to take root in Georgia. An account from Supreme Court records indicates that in the 1890s, a town in Georgia closed its Black high school. Since the town did not also close its White high school, the Blacks of the community brought a suit before the Supreme Court to assert their right to a Black high school if there was a White one. The Supreme Court in 1899 denied their appeal.[7] By 1916, there was one tax-supported Black high school in the state. It was located in the City of Athens.[8]

High school accreditation began in Georgia in 1903, when the first White high schools were accredited. However, it was over two decades later, in 1924, that the first Black high schools were accredited. In 1924, six Black high schools were placed on the accredited list. Four were private and two were public. The two public Black secondary schools were Athens High School and LaGrange High School.[9] In the eight year

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[5]Ibid., pp. 3,4. [6]Ibid., p. 4. [7]Gossett, Race, p. 278.

[8]Kenneth Coleman, ed., A History of Georgia (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), p. 325.

[9]Basoline E. Usher, "Occupations of Negro High School Graduates in Atlanta, Georgia: An Analysis of the Occupational Records of Students Graduating From Three Georgia High Schools, During the Period 1926-1936". (M.A. thesis, Atlanta University, 1937), p. 11.

period from 1924 to 1932, twenty-nine Black high schools were placed on the state's accredited list. Fourteen were publically supported and fifteen were privately supported. Booker T. Washington High School of Atlanta was one of the fourteen accredited public high schools. Although Booker T. Washington High School was probably the third Black public high school to open in Georgia (by 1924), it did not obtain accreditation until 1932. By July 1936, there were thirty accredited public Black high schools in Georgia, and the number of accredited private Black high schools had dropped to ten. The reduction in the number of private Black high schools was due to Black colleges terminating their high school departments, and also to many private Black high school converting to public.[10]

A summary of the growth of Georgia's accredited Black public and private high schools is shown in Chart 1.

Chart 1. Growth of Georgia's accredited Black public and private high schools.

Year	Public	Private	Total
1924	2	4	6
1932	14	15	29
1936	30	10	40

It was in the 1930s that the State of Georgia began to share with private donors a major portion of the financial responsibility of supporting public secondary education for Blacks. The rapid growth from two accredited public Black high schools in 1924 to thirty by 1936 was largely due to the state taking over a pre-existing privately supported

[10] Ibid., p. 8.

school structure. The state took over several county training schools that were originally supported and sustained by private philantropic organizations such as the Jeanes and Slater Funds.[11]

The curricular foundation of Black public secondary education in Georgia was molded by three major influences: (1) the industrial and college preparatory emphasis in most private Black high schools as early as the 1870s; (2) federal assistance in the subsidizing of vocational education courses at the secondary level beginning in Georgia in 1917 through the Smith-Hughes Act; and (3) the imitation of White high schools' emphasis on aesthetics.[12] All of the above themes influenced the educational direction and curricular offerings of Booker T. Washington High School of Atlanta in its founding years from 1924 to 1927.

The dream of establishing secondary education for Blacks in Atlanta began germinating in the minds of Blacks in the 1870s. During Reconstruction, Black Atlantans voted in favor of establishing tax-supported free education for all. They subsequently voted in favor of creating the Atlanta Public School System. Although Black Atlantans helped to establish public education and supported it with their taxes, they were denied a public high school when the secondary education program was initiated for Whites in 1872. Two White high schools, Boys' High and Girls' High, opened in 1872 with an enrollment of 124 males

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[11] Ibid., p. 7.

[12] Ibid., p. 7; Elizabeth C. Smith, "A Study of the Development of the Georgia Public School System, 1900-1950" (M.A. thesis, Atlanta University, 1952), p. 40.

and 171 females.[13]

A Black citizen of Atlanta, William Finch, and twenty-five other Black Atlantans petitioned the City Council in 1872 requesting a high school "for such of their children as were prepared to enter upon such a course of study or that some arrangement be made with Atlanta University so that their children might enter that institution free of charge."[14] Atlanta University's high school (preparatory) department was approximately two years old at the time and sustained by private donations and student tuition. The City Council referred the petition to the Board of Education in September 1872. Two months later, in November, a committee presented a proposal from the President of Atlanta University offering to provide high school instruction to the Black children of Atlanta if the Board would subsidize $3.00 per month per pupil from municipal funds. Atlanta University's offer was denied.[15] The 1870 Census of School Children reported that there were 3,129 Black children between ages six and eighteen in Atlanta.[16] All of these children and the following generations were denied public secondary educational opportunities for five decades because of lack of commitment from the Board of Education. Their only opportunity for a high school education from 1872 to 1924 was if their parents could afford private tuition in one of the Black colleges' high school departments. This tuition charge, although small, prevented the majority of Black elementary

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[13]Henry Reid Hunter, The Development of the Public Secondary Schools of Atlanta, Georgia, 1845-1937 (Atlanta: Atlanta Public Schools, 1974), p. 18.

[14]Ibid., p. 50. [15]Ibid., p. 50. [16]Ibid., p. 49.

graduates from going on to high school.[17] The practice of Blacks having to pay tuition for a secondary education in Atlanta continued for over one half a century. W. E. B. DuBois commented that the Atlanta Negro was "double taxed . . . since he pays his share of the public school tax and in addition is forced to pay tuition charges for his high school training in private schools."[18]

Nineteen years after the first petition, Blacks again petitioned the city for a publically supported high school for their children. In April 1891, the petition was again denied.[19]

In the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, it became obvious that the Atlanta Board of Education and City Council were not willing to commit municipal funds for the support of Black secondary education. Therefore, the five local Black colleges assumed the role of providing high school education for a small portion of the Black population that could afford the tuition. Atlanta University began its high school (preparatory) training in 1870 with over sixty students. Some were from Atlanta and some were from other parts of the state and Southeast.[20] Clark University had seventeen students in its high school department by 1879.[21] Spelman

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[17]Ibid., p. 51.

[18]Toppin, "Walter White and the Atlanta N.A.A.C.P.'s Fight for Equal Schools, 1916-1917," p. 4.

[19]Crimmins, "The Crystal Stair," pp. 121-122.

[20]Hunter, The Development of the Public Secondary Schools of Atlanta, Georgia, pp. 50, 52.

[21]James P. Brawley, The Clark College Legacy: An Interpretive History of Relevant Education, 1869-1975 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 39.

Seminary, Morris Brown College, and Morehouse College also maintained high school departments from the earliest years of their histories.

These five private Black colleges had thriving high school departments all the way into the 1920s. For instance, between 1900 and 1924, the secondary enrollment at Spelman grew from 97 to 320.[22] In 1918, Atlanta University's high school enrollment was 546, and in 1919 it was 442.[23]

The curricular offerings in these high school departments were often modeled after those of New England preparatory schools. In 1870 Atlanta University's three-year high school (preparatory) course of study included higher arithmetic, algebra, geometry, ancient history, ancient geography, Latin, and Greek.[24] The immediate step after the three years of preparatory education was a choice of pursuing a two-year degree from normal school (teacher training) or industrial school (training in technical, agricultural, sanitary, or domestic education). A third choice after preparatory school was pursuing a four-year college degree.[25] Spelman Seminary also offered the additional two-year option of nurse's training after high school.[26] In today's terms, the three years of preparatory work would be equivalent to a junior high school curriculum. The two-year options after preparatory school would

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[22]Crimmins, "The Crystal Stair," p. 199.

[23]Clarence A. Bacote, The Story of Atlanta University, 1865 to 1965 (Atlanta: Atlanta University, 1969), p. 24.

[24]Ibid., pp. 30-31. [25]Ibid., p. 105.

[26]Crimmins, "The Crystal Stair," p. 201.

probably be equivalent to today's senior high school specialty degree areas.

Morehouse College's President, Dr. John Hope, and Atlanta University's President, Dr. Myron Adams, were both quite vocal in their criticism of the city's refusal to establish and sustain a public high school for Blacks prior to 1924. Dr. Hope stated in 1917 that since 1898,

> Atlanta had gone backward in public school facilities for the Negro. There is no Negro high school in Atlanta . . . and only about three in the state . . . . In the Atlanta colored schools there was no industrial training at all.[27]

In Dr. Adams' inaugural address of 1923, he urged the city government to support public secondary education for Blacks. Since Booker T. Washington High School was being constructed at the time of his address, he envisioned Atlanta University discontinuing its high school department during his administration. He wanted the college to concentrate solely on developing a quality collegiate curriculum. Washington High School opened in 1924, and in 1928 Atlanta University became the first of the five Black Atlanta colleges to discontinue its high school department.[28] Within the next eight years the other colleges followed suit.[29] Also the development of the five-college consortium idea in the 1930s must have been an additional stimulus to drop all high school departments and focus entirely on the college and graduate levels.

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[27] Toppin, "Walter White and the Atlanta N.A.A.C.P.'s Fight for Equal Schools, 1916-1917," p. 7.

[28] Bacote, The Story of Atlanta University, p. 169.

[29] Usher, "Occupations of Negro High School Graduates in Atlanta, Georgia," p. 8.

In the short period of twelve years, from 1924 to 1936, the new Black public junior-senior high school had assumed the total burden of providing secondary education for all Blacks in Atlanta. This high school was overcrowded from the opening day and remained overcrowded throughout its history. Some of the major reasons for this condition will be discussed in Chapter IV. In 1930, a second public junior high school facility was made available to Blacks. David T. Howard Elementary School, which opened in 1923 to accommodate grades one through six, was expanded in 1930 to accommodate Black junior high students in Atlanta's Fourth Ward.[30] Booker T. Washington Junior-Senior High School and Howard Junior High School were the only two public secondary schools for a school-age population of over 10,000 Black children by 1930. Eventually, Howard High became a junior and senior high school. The next new high school for Blacks in Atlanta did not emerge until 1951.[31]

This brief historical account indicates that it was in the 1930s when school systems in the state of Georgia began to assume a serious financial commitment to Black secondary education. In 1924, only two Black public high schools were on the state's accredited list. Public secondary education had been established in 1872 for Whites in Atlanta. In that year and in the following years, Black citizens petitioned the city to finance a public high school for Blacks. However, it was not until 1924 that a high school for Blacks was opened in Georgia's largest city. The school opened at this time because of political pressure

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[30]Hunter, The Development of the Public Secondary Schools of Atlanta, Georgia, pp. 56-57.

[31]Melvin W. Ecke, From Ivy Street to Kennedy Center: Centennial History of the Atlanta Public School System (Atlanta: Atlanta Board of Education, 1972), p. 305.

exerted by Blacks in the 1919 and 1921 school bond elections. Without this pressure, a Black public high school may not have been built until the 1930s. This was the decade that a significant number of Black public high schools came into being in Georgia.

To fill the fifty-year void of tax-supported secondary education in Atlanta, five local Black colleges maintained private high school departments. These private high schools influenced the curricular offerings of the city's first Black public high school. Through the presence of these private high schools, at least a small percentage of Black Atlantans were educated beyond elementary school between 1870 and 1920. By 1936, all five of the private high school departments had closed. Booker T. Washington Junior-Senior High School and David T. Howard Junior High School became the new centers for the secondary education of all Blacks in Atlanta.

CHAPTER III

THE FIGHT THAT LED TO THE CREATION OF PUBLIC SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR BLACKS IN ATLANTA, 1917-1923

Between 1917 and 1923 Atlanta was involved in a painful creation process. A high school for Blacks was created out of a political battle between the two races. The setting for this battle began in 1914 with a decision by the Board of Education to eliminate the eighth grade in all elementary schools.

In 1914, the Atlanta Public School System converted from an eight-four grade system (eight years of elementary school and four years of high school) to a seven-four grade system in order to economize. This decision formally abolished the eighth grade in all White and Black elementary schools.[1] For White students, this change meant receiving eleven instead of twelve years of elementary and high school training. For Black students, it meant that the crucial eighth year of schooling had now been lost and the years devoted to education reduced to seven. However, the Black community made no significant protest against this action by the Board of Education.

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[1]Toppin, "Walter White and the Atlanta N.A.A.C.P.'s Fight," p. 9.

Three years later, the Board decided to eliminate the seventh grade in all Black elementary schools, although no such action was contemplated for the White elementary schools. With the savings incurred from eliminating the Black seventh grades, the Board hoped to build a new high school for Whites.[2] By 1917, Whites already had four public high schools: Boys' High, Girls' High, Commercial High, and Technical High.[3]

Atlanta's Black population in 1917 was just under one-third of the city's population, constituting 60,000 out of a total of 185,000.[4] Likewise, Blacks accounted for approximately one-third of the total public school enrollment of 27,935 White and Black students. All of the 8,794 Black day-school students and 774 night-school students were concentrated in the elementary grades because no public high school training existed for them.[5] When some of the leaders of the Black community learned about the Board's plan to eliminate the seventh grade in their elementary schools, they united to take action to block the Board's decision.[6]

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[2]Walter White, A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White (New York: The Viking Press, 1948), p. 29.

[3]Hunter, The Development of the Public Secondary Schools of Atlanta, Georgia, pp. 18, 27, 37.

[4]Toppin, "Walter White and the Atlanta N.A.A.C.P.'s Fight," p. 4.

[5]Atlanta (Georgia) Public Schools, Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools, December 1917, Vol. 8, 1918, p. 10 addendum. (Hereinafter cited as Annual Report).

[6]White, A Man Called White, p. 29.

Initial action was taken through the auspices of the local N.A.A.C.P. Several unsuccessful attempts had been made since 1913 to start a local branch of the national organization. However, insufficient interest in such a branch existed within the community until 1916. The threatened abolition of the Black seventh grades throughout the city was the necessary spark that ignited the formal organization of the branch. Now Black Atlantans had a common cause around which to build a protest movement.[7]

Most of the Black leaders who became involved in the 1917 fight against the Atlanta Board of Education's decision became charter members of the local N.A.A.C.P. They were businessmen, physicians, professors, and ministers. No effort was made to include the less educated working-class masses, although the national office of the N.A.A.C.P. urged the Atlanta Branch to do so. Harry Pace, a Standard Life Insurance Company executive, was elected as the N.A.A.C.P. Branch President. Walter White, Standard Life's cashier, was elected Branch Secretary. Heman Perry, the same company's founder and president, was also a charter member.[8] Dr. William F. Penn, a physician, Dr. John Hope, President of Morehouse College, and Benjamin J. Davis, Sr., editor of the Atlanta Independent newspaper, were some of the other charter members of the newly organized branch.[9]

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[7]Toppin, "Walter White and the Atlanta N.A.A.C.P.'s Fight," p. 8; White, A Man Called White, p. 30.

[8]Toppin, "Walter White and the Atlanta N.A.A.C.P.'s Fight," p. 8.

[9]White, A Man Called White, p. 31.

Out of this pool of leaders, an emergency committee was formed to address the issue of planned elimination of all Black seventh grades. This committee went before the Board of Education on February 21, 1917 with Dr. W. F. Penn and Pastor W. S. Cannon as spokesmen for the delegation.[10] They protested against the Board's decision and also presented a 2,500 word document demanding equal educational opportunities for Blacks, including high schools, "both regular and technical, and new and improved elementary schools.[11] They also insisted on facilities for thorough preparation for high school entrance.[12] Their insistence on equalized high school facilities was based on the fact that in 1917 there were four day-time high schools and one night-time high school for Whites but none for Blacks.[13]

James L. Key, White city councilman for the heavily Black fourth ward, supported the Black delegation's position by acknowledging the inequality in the schools. He also promised his support in working toward improvements.[14] The Board president, R. J. Guinn,

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[10]Atlanta (Georgia) Public Schools, Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Education, Meeting of 21 February 1977, vol. 7, 1967-17, p. 116 (Hereinafter cited as Minutes); White, A Man Called White, p. 31; Toppin, "Walter White and the Atlanta N.A.A.C.P.'s Fight," p. 9.

[11]White, A Man Called White, p. 31.

[12]Minutes, 21 February 1917, vol. 7, 1916-17, p. 116.

[13]Annual Report, December 1917, vol. 8, 1918, p. 10 addendum.

[14]Minutes, 21 February 1917, vol. 7, 1916-17, p. 116; Toppin, "Walter White and the NA.A.C.P.'s Fight," p. 9; White, A Man Called White, p. 31.

informed the delegation that the Board was doing all it could at the time and promised improvements as soon as the city "was able to furnish the necessary money." He also told the delegation that the Board had no desire "to take away the training given at present in the seventh grade without doing equivalent work in another way."[15] The mayor, Asa Candler, gave a conciliatory speech declaring that the Board could not do all it wanted but would do the best it could to improve conditions.[16]

As a result of the Black protest, the Atlanta Board of Education decided not to eliminate the seventh grade in the Black schools. The Board also announced that they had decided to float a bond issue in 1918 to improve Atlanta schools in general.[17] The local White press commented that the announcement by the Board was a victory for the Blacks. The Board President also announced that the schools would be reorganized to give junior high school training and industrial courses for the great majority of Blacks and Whites who would never go to college. The press also reported that the concession concerning the seventh grade and the promises for more comprehensive training came as a result of the Negro committee.[18]

In April 1917, the Atlanta Branch of the N.A.A.C.P. decided to follow up its February victory by encouraging its 300 members to bombard the Board of Education with letters demanding an end to double sessions (half day sessions to accommodate the vast number of Black students with the existing facilities and staff); better physical

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[15] Minutes, 21 February, vol. 7, 1916-17, p. 116.

[16] Ibid. [17] White, A Man Called White, p. 32.

[18] Toppin, "Walter White and the N.A.A.C.P.'s Fight," p. 10.

facilities; a junior high school (commercial and industrial) for the "training of those of our youth who cannot afford a college education;" and high schools for the city's Black boys and girls. Walter White, the drafter of the letter, encouraged the N.A.A.C.P. members to remind the Board of Education that "Atlanta is the only city of her size that has so great a Negro population that does not at least pretend to give high school facilities for Negroes. Colored people pay taxes on over a Million and a Half Dollars worth of property in Atlanta, and yet have a smaller pro rata share . . . expended on them in . . . schools than any city in the country."[19]

The Atlanta Board of Education received a great deal of criticism in the White community and the White press for letting a group of Blacks tell them what to do. Therefore, when the Black delegation met again before the Board later in 1917, they found that the reception was quite distant. The Black delegation wanted to know how much money would be allocated for improvement of Negro education in the forthcoming bond issue. Members of the Board responded "with brutal frankness and considerable profanity that none of the bond money was to be spend on Negro schools and that there was nothing colored citizens could do about it."[20]

Blacks decided that there was something they could do about improving Black schools. One of the Black leaders examined the City charter in order to learn what was required to pass a bond issue.

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[19]Ibid., p. 11. [20]White, A Man Called White, pp. 32-33.

Blacks learned that it took two-thirds affirmative approval of all registered voters to pass a bond issue. With this legal insight to guide them, the N.A.A.C.P. members began a vigorous door-to-door campaign to register Black voters for the purpose of not voting in order to defeat all bond issues that did not aid Black schools. Their major hurdle was the poll tax.[21] However, they were still able to increase Black voter registration from 700 to 3,000 names by 1919.[22] With this voting bloc, they were able to successfully boycott and consequently defeat the bond issues in the general elections of 1918 and 1919.[23]

During 1918, the Board of Education continued to overlook the needs of Black schools while simultaneously finding resources to make school improvements in White schools. An event that inspired Blacks to continue their voter education drive throughout 1918 was the Board's decision to appropriate $20,000 for the erection of a four story concrete building for the use of the White Technical High School. Approval was granted on December 19, 1917.[24] A few weeks later, the Black weekly newspaper, the Atlanta Independent, editorialized about the Board's decision to appropriate money for a White Technical High School without simultaneously appropriating money to relieve the overcrowded Black schools.[25] In February 1918, an Atlanta Independent editorial strongly

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[21]Ibid., p. 33.

[22]Toppin, "Walter White and the Atlanta N.A.A.C.P.'s Fight," p. 15. Note: The Atlanta Independent of March 8, 1919 said there were 2,000 registered Black voters.

[23]Toppin, "Walter White and the Atlanta N.A.A.C.P.'s Fight," p. 15.

[24]Minutes, 19 December 1917, vol. 7, pp. 227-229.

[25]Atlanta Independent, 26 January 1918, p. 4.

criticized the Board's treatment of Blacks. Editor Davis described the Black schools as "not as decent as many of our White neighbor's horse stables . . . They are old shacks, dilapidated, unsanitary and poorly ventilated.[26] Then, the editor stated his disillusionment with the Board's promises over the years by stating:

> The Board of Education has been telling Negroes for ten years it couldn't get money to build schoolhouses for Negroes--not even money to improve the dilapidated, ante bellum shacks that our children are packed in to the tune of double sessions daily . . . if the Board of Education can induce city council to appropriate $100,000 to build White schoolhouses it can induce them to appropriate $100,000 to build Negro schoolhouses.[27]

The editor then recommended that Black citizens vote against every bond issue of any kind until:

> justice is done the Negro children . . . . The story that they can't get money to improve Negro schools, but can get a $100,000 to build White schools, is no longer listened to . . . . It is up to the Negro to organize politically - - - we have begged too long--what we want is relief, results, and nothing else will satisfy. We can change these conditions--we can get better schools."[28]

The bond issue of 1918 focused on general municipal improvements amounting to $800,000. The money was to be used to make repairs at the city waterworks, to convert steam from the incinerator into electricity, and to build a new cyclorama and museum.[29] In addition to the sum of $800,000, the Board of Education requested city council to include an

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[26]Atlanta Independent, 23 February 1918, p. 4. [27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid. [29]Atlanta Constitution, 6 April 1918, p. 2.

additional $200,000 in the bond issue for the construction of some new school buildings.[30] None of these new school buildings would serve the Black community. Apparently, a lack of interest among White and Black voters caused no action to be taken on school bond appropriations that year.[31]

As the bond issue moved into 1919, Black public secondary education in Atlanta continued to be practically nonexistent. There were 3,556 White high school students that year. In the School Superintendent's 1919 Annual Report, Superintendent W. F. Dykes referred to 100 Black students in Ashby Street School's eighth grade as the city's Negro "High School Department."[32] Ashby Street School had been turned over to Blacks earlier that year. Apparently, this Negro "High School Department" was the "first public high school for Negroes" to which Dr. H. H. Proctor referred in an article carried in the Southern Workman magazine in January 1920. Dr. Proctor was pastor of the First Congregational Church for Blacks at the time. He attributed the establishment of Atlanta's first Black high school to the newly formed Atlanta Inter-Racial Committee, a group of Black and White ministers.[33]

The Board of Education was still under the seven-four grade arrangement in 1919 and 1920. However, the Board minutes for those years indicate that by 1920, there were two Black eighth grades. One was at

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[30]Minutes, 9 April 1918, vol 8, 1918, p. 30.

[31]No further reference was made to this bond issue request in the Board of Education Minutes.

[32]Annual Report, 31 December 1919, vol. 10, p. 2-B.

[33]Hollis R. Lynch, The Black Urban Condition: A Documentary History, 1866-1971 (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1973), p. 140.

Ashby Street School and the other was at Houston Street School. Ashby Street School's eighth grade had one teacher, and Houston Street School's eighth grade had two teachers. Their combined enrollment was 252 students by 1920. The Board referred to these two separate entities as the City's "Negro High School" in the Superintendent's 1920 Annual Report.[34] The overall pupil-teacher ratio in the "Negro High School" was 84 to 1. The teachers and administrators of these two schools were probably responsible for this meager attempt at an education beyond seventh grade for Atlanta's Black youth. This informal eighth grade program continued until 1923.

In 1920, the four White high schools had a total of eight principals and assistant principals, five clerks, two librarians, and 132 teachers to serve 3,807 White high school students.[35] This created an overall pupil-teacher ratio in the four high schools of approximately 29 to 1.

A comparison of the male-female ratios in the 1920 White and Negro high schools is worth noting. In the White high schools, there were 1,930 males and 1,877 females. In the "Negro High School," there were 65 males and 187 females. While commenting on the balanced male-female ratio among the White students, Superintendent Dykes stated that "the record of the boys in the high schools is particularly gratifying inasmuch as in the past the girls have largely outnumbered the boys."[36]

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[34]Annual Report, 31 December 1920, p. 78A-E.

[35]Minutes, June 1920, vol. 10, p. 40A-H.

[36]Annual Report, 31 December 1920, p. 78A-E.

Obviously, his comment did not hold for the Black segment of the high school population.

Descriptions of the four White high schools in 1920 follow: Commercial High School (co-educational) had 986 students and 42 administrators and instructional staff members. The school offered courses in English, Bookkeeping, French, Spanish, Stenography, Mathematics, Typewriting, History, Music, Science, Commercial Arts, and Domestic Science. The school was established in 1910. Technical High School (male) had 1,223 students and 47 administrators and instructional staff members. It offered courses in Mathematics, English, Science, Shops, History, Drawing, and Languages. The school was established in 1901. Boys' High School had 554 students and 21 administrators and instructional staff members and offered courses in English, Mathematics, History, Science, and Languages. The school was established in 1872. Girls' High School had 1,044 students and 37 administrators and instructional staff members and offered courses in English, French, History, Latin, Household Arts, Physical Training, Domestic Arts, and Music. The school was established in 1872.[37]

The "Negro High School" of 1919 and 1920 probably offered a curriculum stressing little beyond basic literacy. The separate and unequal code of the South was typified in the Black and White secondary education offerings in the Atlanta Public Schools of 1919 and 1920.

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[37]Minutes, June 1920, vol. 10, p. 40A-H; Annual Report, 31 December 1920, p. 78A-E; Hunter, The Development of the Public Secondary Schools, pp. 18, 27, 36.

Yet Black Atlantans persisted in their strivings to equalize education in Atlanta. A letter from the Colored Public School Teachers' Association addressed to the Board of Education in January 1919 exemplified the anguish of Black Atlanta teachers regarding conditions in the schools. First they requested a "living wage" for all Black teachers since Black teachers received 50 percent of what White teachers received. The fiery letter continued:

> School accommodations for colored people in Atlanta are all but intolerable . . . . We are in a position to know that a large number of people have gone North primarily that their children might receive better Public School accommodations. Again and again the colored people have been promised more schools and better schools, but these promises have been so slow in fulfilling that the people are restless and distrustful. THEY WANT ACTION . . ."[38]

The letter concluded by making the following recommendations: (1) "abolition of the iniquitous double sessions;" (2) a sufficient number of schools to prevent forced attendance of pupils in private schools at an extra expense to their parents; (3) a well-equipped high school be erected for the training of Black students above the elementary grades.[39]

The letter urged that the above recommendations be built into the forthcoming bond issue of March 1919. If these recommendations were assured, the Colored Teachers' Association promised to help get the next bond issue passed. The letter was signed by two Black women who were the President and Secretary of the Association.[40] The President was

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[38]Minutes, 27 January 1919, vol. 9, pp. 23-25.

[39]Ibid. [40]Ibid.

Mrs. India M. Pitts, the principal of Mitchell Street School. She was a principal and teacher in various Atlanta Public Schools for forty-one years. At the end of the year of 1919, she died.[41]

The letter from the Colored Public School Teachers' Association seemed to have little influence on the contents of the school bond proposal submitted by the Board to City Council. The bond was set at approximately $4,050,000 of which $3,505,000, or 87 percent, was to be used for improving and erecting new schools for Whites. Out of this amount, the Board proposed to erect three new senior high schools and five junior high schools for Whites to replace the four old high schools. The rest of the White portion of the funds would be used to improve White elementary schools. The Board proposed to use $545,000 for Black schools, which was 13 percent of the total bond proposal. Out of this amount, the Board proposed to erect one junior high school for Blacks "with industrial features." The rest was to be used to improve Black elementary schools. The bond issue was to be voted on in a referendum on March 5, 1919.[42]

Blacks were wary of this bond proposal and worked together to boycott the polls to defeat the bond issue. However, all Blacks were not for the defeat of the bond program. A Black supporter was Dr. H. H. Proctor, pastor of the First Congregational Church. He felt that Blacks should support the bonds since "no improvements can come to the city as a whole that do not help us Blacks in particular."[43] But Dr. Proctor

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[41]Minutes, Vol. 9, p. 185.

[42]Annual Report, 31 December 1919, vol. 10, p. 2E-F.

[43]Atlanta Constitution, 6 March 1919, p. 4.

and other Black supporters of the bond issue were a definite minority. When the votes were counted, Blacks were the deciding bloc of boycotting voters that brought about the defeat of the bond proposal.

The total number of registered voters was 11,056, while the total number of votes cast in the March 5th election was 4,047. Out of the 11,056 registered voters, Blacks were a significant bloc of 2,000. Most of the 2,000 Blacks boycotted the polls, and an insufficient number of the 9,000 White registered voters showed enough interest in the bond issue to pass it. Thus, the bond issue went down in defeat because it did not receive support from a majority of the 11,056 registered voters.[44]

In an editorial immediately after the election, editor Benjamin Davis discussed the bond issue:

> We had not forgotten the broken promises made to us in previous bond elections, and judging our White neighbors by their records, we did not feel safe in loading ourselves with additional burdens to be discriminated against.[45]

There was considerable controversy in the White community as to whether the defeat of the March 5th bond issue represented the true sentiments of Atlanta voters. Therefore, the City Council scheduled another election for April 23, 1919. The battle was on again. In attempting to obtain stronger support for the bond measure from the White teachers, Attorney C. D. McKinney spoke before the group saying:

> We have been hindered by the Negro, or at any rate, have allowed the Negro to hinder our progress. . . . But if we withhold our means. . . we are starving the minds of

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[44]Atlanta Independent, 8 March 1919, p. 4; E. Bernard West, "Black Atlanta - Struggle for Development, 1915-1925" (M.A. thesis, Atlanta University, 1976), p. 17.

[45]Atlanta Independent, 8 March 1919, p. 4.

> all White children concerned, denying them their heritage.[46]

Blacks were also busy lobbying for support for improvement of their schools. On April 8, 1919 a group of Black citizens representing the city's Black voters came before the City Council. Their purpose was to describe the conditions in the Black schools. Members of the Board of Education responded by explaining that school improvements were a part of the proposed increase of taxes to be voted on in the election of April 23, 1919.[47] In an editorial on April 19th, editor Davis stated this position:

> Vote against bonds until Negro teachers are paid the same salary as the Whites. Vote against higher taxes until we have a library, better school houses, higher schools, play grounds for our children, parks for recreation, police and fire protection and a square deal as citizens of Atlanta.[48]

The April 23, 1919 school bond referendum also went down in defeat.

In explaining why Blacks helped to defeat the two bond proposals of 1919, editor Davis once again used his editorial column to express the sentiment of Blacks: "Atlanta is the most backward city of any city near its size in the southland, so far as providing proper instructions for the Negroes is concerned." He continued by mentioning that the only way that a Black child could receive a high school education was to pay $25.00 per child at one of the five private high schools in the city. However, if a White child wanted a high school education, it was provided by the city government with the aid of "Negro money."[49]

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[46] Atlanta Constitution, 9 March 1919, p. 9.

[47] Minutes, 8 April 1919, vol. 9, p. 89.

[48] Atlanta Independent, 19 April 1919, p. 4. [49] Ibid.

The private Black colleges of the city maintained high school departments in the latter part of the nineteenth century after it became apparent that the Atlanta Public System would not offer secondary training to Black students.[50] The enrollment in Atlanta University's high school department, for example, was significantly larger than the Negro "High School Department" in the public schools in 1919 and 1920. However, Atlanta University's high school population represented three grades beyond elementary school, while the "Negro High School" population of the Atlanta Public Schools represented only one grade beyond elementary school.

Chart 2 below compares the high school enrollment of the two institutions for two years.[51]

Chart 2. A comparison of high school enrollment of two institutions for two years.

Institution	Date	High School Enrollment
Atlanta University High School Department	1918-19	546
Atlanta Public School Negro "High School Department"	1919	100
Atlanta University High School Department	1919-20	442
Atlanta Public School "Negro High School"	1920	252

[50]Further discussion of these private high schools is found in Chapter II.

[51]Bacote, The Story of Atlanta University, p. 169; Annual Report, 31 December 1919, vol. 10, p. 2-B; Annual Report, 31 December 1920, p. 78A-E.

Each student in the high school departments of the five private schools had to pay approximately $25.00 as a tuition fee.

The anguish of Blacks having to pay for secondary education in Atlanta was expressed in the remarks of Black Attorney A. T. Walden when he spoke before the Georgia Association for the Advancement of Education Among Negroes on July 5, 1919. His reference to "anarchist" was indicative of the post-war era in which he lived. He said that "a most dangerous anarchist" could enter this country and could immediately send his children to the public high schools and then to college. However, the Negro, he continued, had been in this country for two hundred years and had to pay a private institution if he wished for his children to be educated beyond elementary school.[52]

After the defeat of the 1919 school bond issue, the Atlanta Public School System steadily eroded in its ability to relieve overcrowding in Black and White schools. The state compulsory attendance law, requiring all children between the ages of eight and fourteen to attend school, was enacted on January 1, 1920.[53] In response to the rising enrollment of 1920, the Atlanta Board of Education resorted to establishing fourteen double sessions in White schools and continuing 114 double sessions in Black schools.[54] By 1921, Atlanta had the second largest school system in the South. In that year, the School System was also financially strained because it equalized White male and female teachers' salaries in January 1921.[55]

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[52] Atlanta Independent, 5 July 1919, p. 1.

[53] E. Bernard West, "Black Atlanta - Struggle for Development, 1915-1925," p. 21.

[54] Minutes, 29 November 1920, vol. 10, p. 71. [55] Ibid.

The federal government's recent Smith-Hughes Bill offered some minor funds to the Atlanta Public Schools for the creation of several vocational classes for Whites and Blacks in 1919. The federal government, through the State Department of Education, paid for half of the cost of maintaining vocational classes. The Atlanta Board of Education offered the following Smith-Hughes classes to Whites: applied electricity, machine shop, machine drawing, auto shops, pipe-fitting, sheet metal, architectural drawing, printing, and wood-work. The Smith-Hughes classes offered Blacks the following courses: auto shops, sewing, and cooking. In October 1919 the Board instructed the Superintendent of Schools to organize "as many as five classes for the Negroes" under the Smith-Hughes Bill. As of September 1920, the enrollment in these vocational classes was 175 Whites and 120 Blacks.[56]

In addition to the desperate need for more school funds, the city government also needed money to increase other municipal services. Therefore, the City Council authorized a bond election for 1921. The new bond election was scheduled for March 8, 1921 and was the first bond election since the 1919 bond issue defeat. The amount of the 1921 bond proposal was set at $8,850,000. Four million dollars of the total was earmarked for school improvements.[57]

Again, Blacks took the opportunity to address the Board members. Prior to the March 8th election, representatives from the Black community

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[56]Minutes, 8 October 1919, vol. 9, p. 175; Annual Report, 31 December 1920, vol. 10, p. 78B.

[57]Atlanta Constitution, 21 January 1921, p. 1.

went before city officials to learn what benefits would be derived by Blacks if they supported the bond issue. This time the new Mayor, James L. Key, and the School Board promised that the $4,000,000 for schools was to be spent "according to the population ratio."[58] This meant that Whites would receive two-thirds ($2,666,666.67) and Blacks would receive one-third ($1,333,333.33). From this amount, the Board promised to erect a high school for Blacks costing approximately $350,000.[59]

An Atlanta Independent editorial strongly endorsed the 1921 bond proposal by assuring Black citizens that this time Blacks were being promised a "square deal." The editorial continued:

> We already have a high school on Ashby Street, and we will have an additional high school for colored people in the South--joining the other great plants in St. Louis, Mo., Washington, D. C., Baltimore, Md., Louisville, Ky., and New Orleans, La.

The editor strongly urged everyone to register and help put the bond program of 1921 over:

> Let us give the White man another chance. Let us give him another opportunity to make good. If we defeat the bonds, we gain nothing. If we put them over, we have them morally bound to carry out their promises.[60]

The mayor appointed a campaign committee to work for passage of the bond issue. In an article to Atlanta newspapers, the committee painted a grim picture of what Atlantans, especially White Atlantans, had to lose by not supporting the school bond. In much of their grim predictions, they implied that White schools would become more and more like the heavily overcrowded Black schools if there were a defeat of the bond

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[58] Atlanta Independent, 10 February 1921, p. 4.

[59] Ibid. [60] Ibid.

issue. They predicted that most of the White schools would have to go on double sessions and that more White children would subsequently fail and be forced to spend two years in the same grade. The committee was also concerned that many of Atlanta's White high school pupils would have to be turned away for lack of room, "for which the city may be subjected to numerous law suits." They were also concerned that tax-paying White non-resident high school students would have to be turned away for lack of room. Lastly, they stated that "the limited amount of education now offered to Negroes will be reduced."[61]

On the other hand, if the bond issue passed, the committee made these specific proposals to the White and Black communities regarding secondary education: (1) four new junior high schools for Whites at $300,000 each; (2) two new senior high schools for Whites (to replace the four existing structures at $600,000 each; (3) one additional White junior high school (converted from the old Commercial High School building); (4) Boys' High building converted into a White Opportunity School for adults; and (5) one combination junior-senior high school for Negroes at $300,000. Regarding the high school for Negroes, the committee made the statement that "another may be provided later if needed."[62]

A summary of the four million dollar usage follows:

Grammar Schools for White and Colored - -	$ 1,260,000
Four Junior High Schools (for Whites) - -	1,200,000
High School for Negroes - - - - - - - -	300,000
Two Senior High Schools (for Whites) - -	1,200,000
	$ 3,960,000

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[61] Atlanta Independent, 17 February 1921, p. 7.

[62] Ibid.

For Turning Commercial High School Into the Fifth Junior High School (for Whites) - - -	40,000
	$ 4,000,000 [63]

Although Blacks were promised one-third of the total four million dollars, the overwhelming majority of their portion was to be used to restore dilapidated elementary schools. Only 7 percent of the four million dollars was proposed for the support of Black secondary education, whereas 60 percent of the four million dollars was proposed for the support of White secondary education. If there was any sincerity in the committee's promise that "another [Black] high school may be provided later if needed," there certainly was no provision for the implementation of such a promise in the immediate years to come.

The 1921 bond election was held on March 5, 1921. The bond program was resoundingly passed by Black and White Atlanta voters. The vote was 21,633 in favor and 513 against the bond issue.[64]

The Board of Education accepted a resolution from its Finance Committee to employ consultants to survey the entire school system to ascertain exactly how and where the bond money should be spent. This resolution was accepted by the Board prior to the passage of the bond issue. However, the consultants were not hired until December 12, 1921. The Board chose to have the survey done by representatives from the Institute of Educational Research of Columbia University's Teachers College under the direction of Dr. George D. Strayer. The cost was not

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Atlanta Journal, 9 March 1921, p. 1.

to exceed $12,000. Professor Nickolaus L. Engelhardt was the Assistant Director. This survey became the roadmap that the Board followed in spending the 1921 bond issue funds. It also became the roadmap for the Atlanta Public School's growth, planning, and development for the next twenty years.[65]

The survey began immediately after Strayer and Engelhardt were hired. The report took three months to complete. After it was finished, the Strayer and Engelhardt Survey Report of 1921-1922 became a two-volume, photographed, five hundred-page document that evaluated almost every facet of the Atlanta Public Schools' facilities and educational productivity. The Survey Report was a "severe, indeed, almost a devastating - criticism of the system."[66] The Survey Report stated that 11 percent of the White grammar schools (or five in number) were uninhabitable. Uninhabitability meant that no child should be required at any time to attend school in such a structure. The Survey Report stated that 66 percent of all Black schools (or ten out of fifteen) were uninhabitable and that only one of the Black school buildings was considered as adequate.[67]

In the Survey Report there was an analysis of the age-grade distribution of Black students. Strayer and Engelhardt found that the large majority of Black students were older than they should have been for their grades and that less than one-fifth fell within the normal age

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[65]Ecke, From Ivy Street to Kennedy Center, p. 141.

[66]Ibid., p. 142. [67]Ibid.

span for any grade. They found that there was fairly consistent attendance up to age 14 to 14½ "after which the elimination from school becomes extremely rapid."[68] They continued by stating that the spread of each age through the various grades was extremely wide. In practically every grade, there were students ages eleven to sixteen. The consultants felt that "the presence of children twelve to sixteen years of age in the first grade is a condition which should not be permitted to exist." For the extremely overaged students, Strayer and Engelhardt recommended that they be cared for in special classes. They assessed that 3.5 percent of all Black children were underage, that 19.2 percent were normal age for their grade, and that 77.3 percent were overage. They found that 66 percent of the White students were overage.[69] Strayer and Engelhardt said that their findings regarding Black student overagedness justified immediate revision of the elementary course of study and the introduction of numerous upgraded rooms for the overage students.[70] They did not say that their findings justified an end to half-day, overcrowded classes for Black students.

Strayer and Engelhardt reported that in the 1921-22 school year there were 592 Black children who were enrolled in grades seven and eight. They maintained that the new junior high program of the Board of Education should include provision for these students. The seventh and eighth

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[68] Report of the Survey of the Public School System of Atlanta, Georgia, School Year 1921-22, George D. Strayer, Director and N. L. Engelhardt, Assistant Director, (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1922), II:145. (Hereinafter cited as Strayer and Engelhardt, Report).

[69] Strayer and Engelhardt, Report, II:146. [70] Ibid.

grade classes for these students were then being held in twelve of the fifteen Black elementary schools.[71]

Ideally, Strayer and Engelhardt recommended that a junior high school for Blacks should be located in Ward 4 (the Auburn Avenue area) to serve approximately 625 students. "This school must be provided for in the next bond issue" [not in the 1921 bond issue]. They also said that "a second junior high is recommended for Ward 1 [the Ashby Street area] to serve 800 children in this residential section who would be attending junior high at this time." Regarding a senior high school for Blacks; they said, "it is recommended that the junior high school plant for Ward 1 be developed in conjunction with a senior high school for the boys and girls of the entire city. This combination of junior and senior high school should be located to the west of the Ashby Street School."[72]

Strayer and Engelhardt concluded their survey document by recommending specifically how the four million dollars from the approved bond issue should be spent. They recommended that $3,010,000 (or 75 percent) should be devoted to White schools and that $990,000 (or 25 percent) should be devoted to Black schools.[73] This was not the two-thirds/one-third ratio that Blacks were promised by Mayor Key's committee prior to the bond election.

With the money available for school improvements, Strayer and Engelhardt recommended that the following structures be built for Whites: three junior high schools, two senior high schools, and seven elementary

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[71]Ibid., II:243-245. [72]Ibid., II:247. [73]Ibid., II:251.

schools. They recommended that one combination junior and senior high school and four elementary schools should be built for Blacks. They recommended that $500 per student should be appropriated to provide for "proper facilities" for White and Black high school students. They estimated that the bond money would serve 1,500 White junior high students and 3,000 senior high students as well as 500 Black junior high students and 300 senior high students.[74] These figures produced totals of 4,500 White high school students and 800 Black high school students. Out of a total of 5,300 high school students to be served by the bond money, Black students were 15 percent and White students were 85 percent of the projected number.

Strayer and Engelhardt were thorough in planning for anticipated growth factors for White secondary education. They projected that the total White enrollment would increase from approximately 28,763 in 1922 to 45,600 in 1940. Of this total, they projected that there would be 8,660 Whites in junior high school and 5,000 Whites in senior high school in 1940. Therefore, they anticipated a need for six or seven junior high schools in the city by 1940. Three of these junior high facilities were already planned into the 1921 bond money expenditures. No projections, analyses, or recommendations were made for anticipated Black high school student growth or expansion up to 1940.[75]

The expenditures recommended by Strayer and Engelhardt for secondary education improvements totaled 61 percent of the entire four million

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[74]Ibid., II:251.

[75]Ecke, From Ivy Street to Kennedy Center, p.160; Strayer and Engelhardt, Report, II:237.

dollar budget. Thirty-nine percent was allocated for elementary education improvements. The specific amounts for secondary education improvements are itemized below:

3 White junior high schools - -	$ 600,000
2 White senior high schools - -	1,500,000
	$ 2,100,000
1 Combination junior-senior high school for Blacks to accommodate	
500 junior high pupils - -	$ 200,000
and 300 senior high pupils - -	$ 150,000
	$ 350,000 [76]

The Board approved and began implementing the Survey Report in the Spring of 1922 by stating that "it is the desire and purpose of the Board of Education to carry out the recommendations contained in the survey report."[77] They began plans for the Black high school in May. The Board had allocated $284,910 for the combination junior-senior high school for Blacks compared to an allocation of $424,590 for the new Girls' (senior) High and $479,843 for Boys' (senior) High.[78]

On May 10, 1922, the Board of Education authorized the purchase of land for the "colored junior-senior high school." The Board minutes stated that the Survey Report recommended that the colored high school should be erected on a site west of Ashby Street School. Therefore the Board's Finance Committee recommended the purchase of a tract of 13.349 acres in the sub-division of the property of the Citizens Trust Company. The property was bound by Beckwith Street on the west, "C" Street (now Whitehouse Drive) on the east and Beacon Street on the north. The

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[76] Strayer and Engelhardt, Report, II:252-253.

[77] Minutes, 10 May 1922, vol. 10, p. 225.

[78] Minutes, 16 October 1922, vol. 11, p. 24-A.

committee recommended that the Board purchase this vacant land for $36,600.[79]

From June 1922 to November 1922, the Board adopted several other actions pertaining to the erection of the Black high school. On June 13th, the Board formally purchased the land which came to 14.75 acres for a final figure of $42,500.[80] This location also fitted in well with the newly adopted 1921 City Zoning Ordinance that encouraged further residential segregation of the races.[81] The Board chose Eugene C. Wackendorff as the architect.[82] The building was to be designed to accommodate academic and vocational classes.

The Board appointed a committee from among its members to name the Black high school and all the other new schools being built out of the 1921 bond issue funds. The committee selected the name of Booker T. Washington Junior-Senior High School on October 7, 1922 in honor of the late Alabama educator.[83]

In November 1922, the Board awarded the construction contract for the erection of Washington High School to the McDevitt Fleming Company of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Their winning bid was for $234,900.[84]

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[79]Minutes, 10 May 1922, vol. 10, p. 225.

[80]Minutes, 13 June 1922, vol. 10, p. 246.

[81]Strayer and Engelhardt, Report, II:172-173; West, Black Atlanta - Struggle for Development, pp. 28-29.

[82]Minutes, 8 August 1922, vol. 10, p. 251; Minutes, 15 December 1925, vol. 14, p. 17; Minutes, 21 May 1926, p. 149. (A. Ten Eyck Brown was supervising architect for the structures built out of the 1921 school bond money. He probably hired or assigned various architects to design individual structures. E. C. Wackendorff did the original designs for Washington High).

[83]Minutes, 7 October 1922, vol. 11, p. 11.

[84]Minutes, 14 November 1922, vol. 11, p. 31.

The construction began immediately afterwards and was scheduled for completion by September 1923. However, this completion date was not realized. By early 1923, construction of the new Black high school was well underway, but later that year construction came to a halt because of a contract dispute with the company and the Board.

As the building was going up, there was some apprehension and concern in the Black community about this new school. Blacks were concerned that they were receiving one combination junior and senior high school, whereas Whites were receiving separate junior and senior high schools. However, by then, plans had been adopted and set in motion. Besides, many Blacks thought the building was developing into a very handsome structure that was better than anything in the past and comparable to any high school building in the country.[85]

In 1923, a high school and four new elementary schools were being constructed for Blacks out of the 1921 bond issue money. In the midst of the rise of these future facilities, Black students in 1923 were continuing to experience increased overcrowding and poor facilities. The hope and the reality existed together during that year. Out of Georgia clay, the new four-story brick high school building for Blacks was slowly emerging. It was the high school that Black Atlantans petitioned for in 1872 and later demanded in 1891, 1917, 1918, 1919 and 1921. A half century old dream had materialized into bricks and mortar. The dream even had a name. However, it would be another year before the school took on people and a distinct personality.

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[85]Atlanta Daily World, 7 March 1974.

CHAPTER IV

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON JUNIOR-SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL: THE FORMATIVE YEARS, 1924-1927

The years from 1924 to 1927 set the direction for Atlanta's new Booker T. Washington Junior-Senior High School. The Black community's fifty-year old dream of acquiring a public secondary educational facility became a concrete reality on September 8, 1924 when the school opened its doors to students. During its founding years, the school transformed itself from a hollow new building of bricks and mortar into an educational center alive with the aspirations of almost 1,700 people annually.

A pivotal force that influenced Washington High School's early history was the pressure of racial discrimination imposed on it by its governing body, the Atlanta Board of Education. Another pivotal force was the pressure from within itself to find self-meaning and self-direction. This interplay of racial discrimination from without and a drive for self-definition from within molded the character of the school's early years. Because the Board of Education Minutes are the major primary source for this study, more emphasis will be placed on the outward pressures from the Board than on the school's internal strivings.

Attention will also be given to an analysis of the following issues: the school's impact on the Black and White communities; the

the degree to which the school was able to meet the secondary educational needs of all Black high school youth of Atlanta; the impact of racial discrimination on the school; the nature of the curricular offerings; and the expression of self-definition as reflected by the student extra-curricular activities and the Parent-Teacher Association's activities.

Washington High School was an outgrowth of the strained conditions in Atlanta's Black elementary schools prior to its opening. In many ways, Washington High School inherited a number of the problems of its elementary school predecessors—particularly the problems of overcrowding, double sessions, high pupil-teacher ratios, and unequal teachers' salaries based on racial bias. One problem that Washington High School did not inherit from the majority of its elementary school predecessors was a poor physical facility. Attention must be given to the pervasive problems of the Black public elementary schools in 1923 and 1924 in order to understand the larger educational context in which Washington High School existed and functioned beginning in 1924.

A special citizens' committee of Black Atlantans entitled the "Committee on Public Schools for Negro Children" appointed six of its members to investigate the conditions in the Black schools as of September 1923. The six members were Dr. John Hope, President of Morehouse College, Attorney A. T. Walden, Dr. G. A. Towns, professor at Atlanta University, Mrs. John Hope, community worker, and W. A. Bell. Their findings painted a grim picture of conditions in the Black schools. They found that only 4,300 out of a total of 11,500 Black children had seats in the twelve school buildings allocated to Blacks. In these twelve buildings, there

were 114 rooms--a ratio of 100 pupils per room. There were 159 teachers which created a pupil-teacher ratio of 79 to 1. The 159 elementary teachers had 217 separate classes to teach. There were 9,028 Black children on double session and 727 on triple session. Only 203 (less than 2 percent) of all Black children were in school for a full day.[1]

The committee made two recommendations to the Black citizens of Atlanta: 1) to have the Board of Education erect portables at most of the schools to relieve overcrowding; and 2) to request the Board to convert Walker Street School and Davis Street School from White to Black schools. Neither recommendation was immediately considered by the Board. However, the Board did open the David T. Howard Elementary School in September 1923. But four months later, this new school had thirteen double sessions and was doubled through the fourth grade.[2] This was the desperate situation that Atlanta's Black children had to endure throughout their grammar school careers immediately prior to the opening of Washington High School.

Yet the prospect of relief was imminent with the anticipated opening of Washington High School in 1923. At least the seventh and eighth grades would then be accommodated at the new high school facility. When construction work began on Washington High School in 1922, the finishing date was projected by the contractors to be September 1923. However, contractual difficulties between the Board of Education and the contractors delayed the opening for a full year. Rather than penalize the Black

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[1] Atlanta Independent, 31 January 1924, pp. 1, 8.

[2] Ibid.

students who were ready to begin their high school careers in the 1923-24 school year, six temporary junior high school departments were organized. The Board temporarily arranged seventh, eighth, and ninth grades in the following Black elementary schools: Ashby Street School, Bell Street School, W. H. Crogman School, Gray Street, E. P. Johnson School, and Mitchell Street School.[3]

Washington High School's first faculty members were hired in May of 1923 to teach in these six temporary junior high school departments until the permanent high school could be opened in 1924. This original faculty consisted of a principal, an assistant principal, and 15 teachers. Their academic specialty areas were English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Home Economics, and Music.[4] Therefore, for one full year, most of these teachers and administrators served as junior high teachers in six of the overcrowded Black elementary school facilities. This 1923-24 school year with its six temporary junior high school departments might be considered Washington High School's "parents"--or its immediate predecessor.

In that year, a considerable disparity existed between teaching costs per pupil in Black and White schools involved in secondary education. The various teaching appropriations per pupil were compared for eight White schools and six Black schools, all of which were involved in educating high school students. Chart 3 below itemizes the Board of Education's expenditures for teaching costs per pupil:[5]

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[3]Minutes, 8 May 1923, vol. 11, p. 139; Atlanta Public Schools, "Booker T. Washington High School," a folder in the Atlanta Public School Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

[4]Minutes, 8 May 1923, vol. 11, p. 139.

[5]Minutes, 1 November 1923, p. 16-B.

Chart 3. Board of Education's expenditures for teaching costs per pupil.

White Schools			
Boys' High	$15.11	Bass Junior High	$12.09
Commercial High	$14.03	Brown Junior High	$12.04
Girls' High	$13.05	O'Keefe Junior High	$10.83
Tech High	$15.32	Hoke Smith Junior High	$11.78

Black Schools			
Ashby Street School	$ 2.03	Gray Street School	$ 1.86
Bell Street School	$ 2.45	E. P. Johnson School	$ 1.99
		Crogman School	$ 2.23

With the overcrowding, the disproportionate distribution of funds, and lack of facilities for Black secondary education, Blacks were especially anxious for the first Black high school to open. However, in 1923 a contract dispute arose that had to be resolved in order to complete the Washington High School building. The original construction contract for "the colored junior-senior high school" was awarded to the McDevitt-Fleming Company of Chattanooga, Tennessee on November 24, 1922.[6] The original architect was Eugene C. Wackendorff.[7] The building was to be ready for occupancy by September 1923. However, by early October 1923, the McDevitt-Fleming Company notified the Atlanta Board of Education that it declared the contract to complete the construction of the

[6]Minutes, 13 October 1923; 13 November 1923, vol. 12, pp. 11-12.

[7]Minutes, 15 December 1925, vol. 14, p. 17; 21 May 1923, p. 149; 9 June 1926, p. 163.

colored junior-senior high school and the west junior high school (for Whites) to be "at an end". The company terminated the contracts because it said the Board failed to pay for labor and material which were due under said contracts. The City of Atlanta, through its Board of Education, declined to pay because "it has developed that said contractor will not be able to finish the buildings for said schools within the guaranteed contract price." The City of Atlanta then resolved to "proceed to complete said building."[8] The McDevitt-Fleming contract was formally terminated on November 9, 1923.[9]

Shortly after November 9th, it was resolved at a Board of Education meeting that A. Ten Eyck Brown, supervising architect for the new Girls' High School building, would also become the supervising architect to complete the colored junior-senior high school building and the west (side) junior high school for Whites. This resolution was adopted on November 23, 1923. W. A. Sims, Mayor of Atlanta at the time, approved the action on November 23, 1923.[10] In January 1924, the Board voted to allocate $48,000 for the completion of the Washington High School building. The money was to be used to complete the electrical, plumbing, and heating components of the building.[11]

On June 16, 1924, an appropriation was made to purchase the following equipment for Washington High School:[12]

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[8]Minutes, 13 October 1923, vol. 12, p. 12-C.

[9]Minutes, 24 January 1924, vol. 12, p. 41.

[10]Minutes, October 1923, vol. 12, pp. 1-3; 13 November 1923, vol. 12, pp. 11-12.

[11]Minutes, 29 January 1924, vol. 12, p. 57

[12]Minutes, 16 June 1924, vol. 12, p. 162A.

"Standard Food Laboratory for Negro School"	$1,705.86
"Standard Equipment for Clothing Laboratory, Negro School"	1,000.00
"Lockers for Colored Junior-Senior High 500 @ $6.45"	3,225.00
"Wood Shop for Colored Junior-Senior High"	1,500.00
"Automobile Shop for Junior-Senior High"	500.00
"Equipment for Classes in Tailoring, Junior High School for Negroes"	361.39
"Material for plastering concrete work in Junior-Senior High School for Negroes"	398.00

A partial list of expenditures that had been appropriated from the 1921 bond money for secondary education was cited in the Board of Education Minutes of September 30, 1924. The expenditures up to that date were itemized as follows:[13]

Buildings	
Boys' Senior High	$ 156,922.50
Girls' Senior High	69,000.00
Colored Junior-Senior High	308,549.05
N/W Junior High	294,761.14
N/E Junior High	1,165.36
West Junior High	219,020.22
Land	
N/W Junior High	$ 17,500.00
Boys' Senior High	75,000.00
Colored Junior-Senior High	42,000.00

[13]Minutes, 30 September 1924, vol. 12, p. 234.

This list represents almost the full amount expended for the one junior-senior high school for Blacks, which came to a final total of $354,614.01.[14] However, these figures do not represent a full portion of the totals expended for some of the other schools that are listed, especially the Girls' High School total.[15]

The projected opening date of Washington High was set for September 8, 1924, although the building would not be entirely complete. The seating capacity was announced in the Black weekly newspaper as 1,400.[16] With construction finally moving toward completion and a projected opening date established, the Board of Education began to finalize plans for entry grades, curriculum, and faculty additions.

The school opened with four grade levels in its first year: seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth. One grade was added each year until the twelfth grade was established in September 1926.[17]

The formal curriculum plan for the school was finalized by the Board in mid-1924. This curriculum, especially at the senior high level, was designed to give a student either an academic college preparation or a general education focusing on skills. Both technical and literary courses were offered. During the first two years (seventh and eighth grades), students took the same fundamental courses. In the second two years, students specialized along literary, scientific or technical lines. The Atlanta Independent commented that "Assistant Superintendent

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[14]Minutes, 21 May 1926, vol. 14, p. 149.

[15]Minutes, 11 January 1924, vol. 12, p. 41 (This citation lists $364,843.00 as the amount necessary to complete Girls' High).

[16]Atlanta Independent, 4 September 1924, pp. 1-2. Note: Various sources cite the initial seating capacity from 1,100 to 1,400. [17]Ibid.

Mr. Hunter, assures us that the curriculum offered will meet the standard requirements of the leading colleges of the country."[18]

The final choice for principal of Washington High School was not determined until a few days before the school was scheduled to open. The assistant principal, Miss Basoline Usher, had been selected in May of 1923. However, at that time, Mr. J. B. Watson had been selected as principal.[19] Very little information is available as to why Mr. Watson did not serve as Washington High School's first principal.

On August 25, 1924, the Board of Education confirmed the nomination of Mr. Charles Lincoln Harper to be Washington High School's first principal.[20] The choice of C. L. Harper was the result of recommendations of several civic organizations of the city.[21] In the preceding year, Mr. Harper had been principal of the Yonge Street Night School and also principal of the High School Department of Morris Brown University.[22] Therefore, he was no stranger to secondary education.

In August and September, 1924, the Board amassed a faculty of 46 teachers for the 1924-25 academic year. Their fields of specialty were in the areas of English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Latin, Home

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[18]Atlanta Independent, 4 September 1924, pp. 1-2.

[19]Minutes, 8 May 1923, vol. 11, p. 139.

[20]Minutes, 25 August 1924, vol. 12, p. 211.

[21]Atlanta Independent, 4 September 1924, p. 1-2.

[22]Minutes, 25 August 1924, vol. 12, p. 211.

Economics, Science, Bookkeeping, Physical Education, Tailoring, Sewing, Auto Mechanics, Manual Arts, and Music.[23]

The initial enrollment of the school in 1924 was approximately 1,642,[24] yet the seating capacity was approximately, 1,400. Thus, overcrowding was a part of the school's history from the very first week. One combination junior and senior high school had been built to satisfy the total needs of the Black community's more than 1,600 secondary students. However, four separate junior high schools existed for 5,567 white students, and four separate senior high schools existed for 2,783 white students.[25] There were probably hundreds of other Black Atlantans, ages fifteen through eighteen, who did not even register to attend the school. Many of these youth were probably involved in some type of menial work; many probably thought they were too old to begin the ninth grade; many probably felt remorseful because they had missed the opportunity to attend high school by only a year or two.

The assistant principal of the school, Miss Basoline Usher, made a study of various qualities of the school's early graduates. Her study provides some important insights about certain characteristics of these early students. She found that the students who enrolled at

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[23]Atlanta Public Schools, Directory of Faculty for 1924-25 (Atlanta: Atlanta Board of Education, 1924), pp. 46-47.

[24]Atlanta Independent, 18 September 1924, p. 5. Note: In the "Booker T. Washington High School" folder in the Atlanta Public School's Archives the figure is set at 1,293.

[25]Atlanta Independent, 18 September 1924, p. 5.

Washington High School and subsequently graduated in the first few years were predominately female and averaged a median age of over 19 when they graduated. She also found that approximately 66 percent of these students were native born Atlantans, 29.2 percent were natives of Georgia, and 4.7 percent were born out of the state.[26] These were characteristics of Washington High School's "first fruits" of its first decade.

The new facilities for Washington High School and Girls' High School were both funded from the 1921 school bond appropriations. A controversy arose among city and school board officials as to the best location for the new Girls' High School facility. This controversy delayed the construction, the completion and the opening date of the school. Although Washington High School was a year late in opening, Girls' High School was even later in coming to a completion. Since the Black high school opened while the new White female high school facility was still under construction, a great deal of outrage was expressed about this matter by one of the city's mayoral candidates of 1924. Washington High School became the focus of a heated debate between mayoral candidates in the white primary of mid-September 1924. Former Mayor James L. Key, a 1924 candidate for mayor in opposition to incumbent Mayor Walter A. Sims, declared that "Mayor Sims' campaign has narrowed down to the [issue of the] Negro high school and the public comfort station."[27] Sims accused former Mayor Key (who was Mayor during the passage of the

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[26] Usher, "Occupations of Negro High School Graduates in Atlanta, Georgia," pp. 15, 17.

[27] Atlanta Independent, 18 September 1924, pp. 1-2.

1921 school bond issue) of putting the Negro High in a higher priority over the Girls' High School. In his own defense of this accusation, Key explained that Negroes were promised a high school when the 1921 bond campaign was in progress. Key said that White people voted for the bonds with the understanding that a Negro High School would be erected. He countered:

> (Sims) accused me of building the Negro High School ahead of the White Girls' High School, and inference being that the Girls' High School could have been speeded up by holding back the Negro High School.[28]

Key contended that Mayor Sims was a part of the Board that approved the school bond expenditure program, and Sims voted for it. Key continued by saying:

> As everyone knows, the Girls' High School. . . controversy as to where it should be located. I did not start the controversy. I regretted it; I did all in my power to settle it. In my effort to settle it, I voted in favor of every site proposed. To have held up the building of every other school in the school bond program would not have speeded up the Girls' High School one day or one hour, and the people know it. . . . Mayor Sims is simply trying to inject a racial issue into a White primary, an unworthy and discretable thing for him to do, and an affront to the intelligence of our people.[29]

In a pre-election and a post-election editorial, the editor of the Atlanta Independent expressed his regret over Washington High School becoming a political issue. The pre-election editorial stated that it was "extremely regretted" that the newly constructed Washington High

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[28]Ibid. [29]Ibid.

School had been made an issue in the mayoralty race in the city. Editor Davis reported as follows:

> Indeed, politicians are running very short of ammunition when they inject an educational institution into their campaign with the view of prejudicing votes. . . . Such an issue does not dignify a candidate, but rather resolves itself to the out-of-date proposition of getting elected to office on a platform of Negro hate.[30]

Mayor Sims, the candidate who declared himself against the opening of Washington High School, was re-elected in September 1924. In a post-election editorial, the Atlanta Independent declared that the recent White primary's controlling issue

> was neither economic, industrial, nor social, but racial. . . . (Atlantans) must hang their heads in shame when they see a candidate for mayor ride into office on a platform of race hatred and religious intolerance.[31]

The editor continued by stating that the chief issue raised by the successful candidate was that his opponent built a high school for Blacks.

> What a crime he committed! An unpardonable sin, he committed! The crime of building a Negro High School was so felonious and startling in the language of the mayor that he must be condemned and kept out of office for life.[32]

Being used as a political football was not Washington High School's only woe. From its opening week, it was evident that the high school would offer the Black youth of Atlanta too little too late in terms of seating facilities and staffing. Eight separate buildings and 378

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[30]Ibid., p. 4.

[31]Atlanta Independent, 2 October 1924, p. 4. [32]Ibid.

teachers were available for white secondary education.[33] One combination junior and senior high school building and 43 teachers were available for the instruction of all Black high school youth.

Five months after the opening of Washington High School, the overcrowding problem was the subject of an editorial in the Black newspaper. The editorial first mentioned the overcrowded conditions at Washington High School and its need for immediate relief. The article continued by stating that School Superintendent Willis Sutton obviously thought there would be ample room at Washington High School for all colored children ready for high school. But the Superintendent was "honestly mistaken." Washington High School was now threatened with the "affliction of double sessions." After a full description of the school's problem, the editorial proposed an end to co-education at Washington High School as a solution to overcrowding. Contending that "co-education is not the best method of educating our youth," the editorial proposed that Washington High School should be left to the girls and Walker Street School, practically unused, should be the temporary school for colored boys. Whites had a Girls' High and a Boys' High, and what was good for one group was good for the other. The editorial ended by stating that this suggestion had been brought to the newspaper staff's attention by one of Atlanta's most outstanding citizens.[34] This idea was never heeded by the Board of Education. However, in August 1925, the Board did consider using Walker Street School as an annex to house

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[33]Atlanta Public Schools, Directory of Faculty for 1924-25, pp. 19-27.

[34]Atlanta Independent, 5 February 1925, p. 4.

Washington High School's seventh grade for which there was no space in the main building.[35] This plan, likewise, was not implemented.

By October 1925, the Board officials reported that Washington High School was "badly overcrowded". The enrollment was 1,947. "The classes are very large, averaging about 40 pupils per class. The seventh grade is on double session."[36] Within one year of existence, even this brand new facility had succumbed to the infamous double sessions to which all its sister Black schools had succumbed long ago.

By comparison, the enrollment at the White high schools in October 1925 was as follows:[37]

Junior High Schools		Senior High Schools	
Bass Junior High	1,604	Boys' High	399
Brown Junior High	1,194	Commercial High	692
O'Keefe Junior High	1,434	Girls' High	688
Smith Junior High	1,415	Tech High	861

The idea of using portables for the White junior high schools was raised in December 1925 at a Board of Education meeting. The discussion focused on whether or not to purchase six portables for Bass Junior High, six for Brown Junior High, four for O'Keefe Junior High, and six for Smith Junior High. This would have meant a total of twenty-two portable classroom units at $1,000.00 each. Although the Board members desired to purchase the portable units "to avoid double sessions in the Junior High Schools [so that]White Junior High pupils should be cared for in

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[35]Minutes, 11 August 1925, vol. 13, p. 177.

[36]Minutes, 13 October 1925, vol. 13, p. 214-C. [37]Ibid.

this way in order that their progress through the high schools might not be seriously retarded," nothing was mentioned about Washington Junior and Senior High School. The vote to obtain portables was approved on December 8, 1925 and later rescinded on January 28, 1926.[38] The Board of Education Minutes did mention portables being placed at Washington High School at least once between 1924 and 1927. In 1924, the Board voted to move a three-room portable formerly used by the Boys' Special School to Washington High School to be used as a shop unit.[39]

By January 1926, Washington High School's overcrowding was once again the subject of an editorial comment in the Atlanta Independent. The article quoted statistics provided by the Superintendent's office of the Atlanta Public Schools which verified a total seating capacity of 1,170. The enrollment at Washington High School was cited as being approximately 1,882, showing 712 more students than seats. The same article stated that in the Black elementary schools, there were 5,641 children who were without seats, making a total of 6,353 Black children without seats in the public schools.[40]

Washington High School was not only well used in the day time; it was also well used at night. In 1925, the Ashby Street Night School was transferred to the Washington High School building. By October 1925, its enrollment was 535.[41] When the transfer was made, the

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[38]Minutes, 8 December 1925, vol. 14, pp. 5, 7; Minutes, 28 January 1926, vol. 14, p. 43.

[39]Minutes, 16 September 1924, vol. 12, p. 229.

[40]Atlanta Independent, 21 January 1926, p. 4.

[41]Minutes, 13 October 1925, vol. 13, p. 214.

curriculum was expanded to include senior high school work for the first time. The offerings included courses from the first through the twelfth grades plus courses in business, music, auto mechanics, tailoring, cooking, and sewing.[42]

Besides the regular day-time and night-time curricula, Washington High School also housed the Smith-Hughes classes that were sponsored by the federal government. Smith-Hughes classes were vocationally-oriented courses. Washington High School offered one class in tailoring, two classes in cooking, two classes in sewing, and one class in carpentry under this program.[43]

Added to the constant problem of being overcrowded and overused, Washington High School was involved in responding to a community crisis in late 1926. On December 29, 1926, the Ashby Street School was burned very badly by arsonists. At the Atlanta Board of Education meeting of January 3, 1927, the Board unanimously adopted the following recommendations regarding the emergency usage of Washington High School in light of the Ashby Street School crisis: Two classes of Ashby Street sixth graders were to be sent to Washington High School. Also two sixth grade classes from E. A. Ware School were to be sent to Washington High School in order to make more room for displaced Ashby Street students assigned to E. A. Ware School. This adjustment meant that four sixth grade classes were added to the overcrowded situation already existing at Washington High School. The other Black schools that temporarily

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[42]Ecke, From Ivy Street to Kennedy Center, pp. 196-197.

[43]Minutes, 13 October 1925, vol. 13, p. 214.

received Ashby Street classes were Gray Street Elementary School and Crogman Elementary School.[44] The work of arsonists had brought about this additional strain on five Black schools.

The yoke of racial discrimination revealed itself in ways other than the school being overcrowded and overused in its early history. A tone that permeated the educational atmosphere of the Board of Education was that of inequality of the races. This tone was evident in at least four distinct instances in Washington High School's history between 1925 and 1927.

Racial discrimination was quite apparent in salary inequities between Black and White high school teachers in 1926. The Board of Education Minutes reveal the following salary schedule for White and Black teachers, which indicates that White teachers received approximately 40 percent more than their Black counterparts.[45]

	Probation	First Year	Second Year	Third Year	Fourth Year	Fifth Year
White Teachers:						
Bachelors	$ 1572	$1722	$1872	$2022	$2172	$2322
Masters	1722	1872	2022	2172	2322	2472
Principal (B.A.)	3000	3200	3400	3600	3800	4000
Principal (M.A.)	3200	3400	3600	3800	4000	4200
Black Teachers:						
	$ 960	$1080	$1200	$1320	$1440	$1560
Assistant Principal	1572	1692	1812	1932		
Principal	2100	2220	2340	2460		

[44]Minutes, 3 January 1927, vol. 15, p. 71.

[45]Minutes, January 1926, vol. 14, pp. 44A-C.

Racial discrimination was also evident in the exclusion of Principal Harper from a major Board of Education committee in 1925. The Board created a committee on "Curriculum Reorganization for the High Schools." Its membership was composed of all of the senior and junior high school principals--all except Principal Harper. This important committee established the new program of studies for each of the senior and junior high schools. Washington High School had no input at all.[46]

An additional instance of discrimination in Washington High School's early history was another act of omission by the Board of Education. On September 21, 1926, Superintendent Sutton asked the Board's permission to place librarians at four of the eight White junior and senior high schools that did not have them.[47] It would be several years in the future before Washington High School students would have the benefit of a librarian's services.

The final example of discrimination to be noted was an attempt by the Board of Education to eliminate all six night school programs for Blacks during a budget crunch in February 1927. One of these night schools was at Washington High School. After a vigorous community protest by Black and White Atlantans, this attempted coup was quelled. The Board finally decided to eliminate two of the programs and to leave four night schools for Blacks.[48] One of those spared was Washington

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[46]Minutes, 12 May 1925, vol. 13, p. 113; Ecke, From Ivy Street to Kennedy Center, p. 194.

[47]Minutes, 21 September 1926, vol. 14, p. 251.

[48]Minutes, 22 February 1924, vol. 15, p. 93.

High School's Night School. However, the budget ax hovered closely around the neck of this night school for many years to come.

The Board of Education had yielded to the point of providing a secondary educational facility for Blacks in Atlanta. However, they had also made it known by their discriminatory practices that the school was not just another high school in the Atlanta Public School System. It was the Negro High School--the less-than-equal high school. In those formative years, it became the task of the Washington High School administrators, teachers, and students to define themselves either in the Board of Education's terms or on their own terms. The administrators, teachers, and students of Washington High School seemed to be determined to find their own purpose, direction, and self-meaning. They immediately began to create their own momentum from within the walls of the school. Some of the ingredients that nurtured and directed this momentum were the unique character, qualifications, and background of Principal Harper and Assistant Principal Usher, and the strong academic backgrounds of many of the teachers from 1924 to 1927.

Principal Harper, a native of Sparta, Georgia, was a graduate of Morris Brown University. He furthered his education at Columbia University, the University of Chicago, and Northwestern University. He was the first principal of the Yonge Street Evening School from 1915 to 1924. He was also the principal of Morris Brown's High School Department.[49] Then, in 1924, he received widespread support to be appointed

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[49]Atlanta Public Schools, "Booker T. Washington High School," a folder in the Atlanta Public School Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

principal of Washington High School, where he served for the school's first eighteen years. He had a reputation for pushing students and faculty to their highest levels. Within the first few months after the school opened, he had organized the Parent-Teacher Association (P.T.A.). His great emphasis was on strong academic preparation for post-secondary work.

Miss Basoline Usher was Assistant Principal from 1924 to 1929. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Atlanta University in 1906. She taught high school mathematics in Virginia from 1906 to 1911 and also mathematics in a Virginia normal school for four years. She joined the Atlanta Public Schools in 1915 as a sixth grade teacher at Bell Street School. From 1916 to 1920, she was Assistant Principal of Bell Street, and served as Principal of Wesley Avenue Elementary School from 1920 to 1923. She joined the staff of Washington High School in 1923 as the Assistant Principal and ninth grade mathematics teacher at the temporary Gray Street School location for that year.[50] She, too, was very academically oriented.

The academic backgrounds of the early teachers were also impressive. The overwhelming majority had earned their Bachelor of Arts degrees. The majority of the teachers had received their degrees from the five local Black colleges, while other Bachelor of Arts degrees had been obtained from the University of Michigan, Shaw University, Temple University, Claflin University, Hampton Institute, Philander Smith College, Cleveland Preparatory Institute, and the

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[50] Ibid.

American Technical Society. Several of the teachers had done advanced work beyond the Bachelor of Arts--one as far away as Paris.[51] These early teachers had relatively strong academic backgrounds and probably emphasized strong academic preparation to their students.

The kind of extra-curricular activities performed by students gives some indication of the sense of self-direction in which the school was going in these formative years between 1924 and 1927. Within one month of its opening, the school was among the eighteen Black institutions that had exhibits at the Southeastern Fair. Most of the eighteen schools were in the Atlanta Public School System along with Holmes Institute and Spelman College.[52] A few months later, Washington High School students took an imaginary trip around the world at an exhibit given in the building. The purpose was for pleasure and for instruction. In January 1925, the Atlanta Independent announced that in April one hundred Washington High School students were going to participate in a "Fashion Revue" at the Crystal Theatre. It was billed as the most elaborate affair of its kind ever undertaken in Atlanta.[53] In February 1925, the school's students performed in an operetta entitled "Cherry Blossom" given at the Paramount Theatre. The Black newspaper stated that it was a very charitable performance and was well

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[51]Washington High School, Washington High School, 1924 to 1974, a 50th Year Anniversary Souvenir Booklet in the "Booker T. Washington High School" folder at the Atlanta Public School's Archives, Atlanta, Georgia, 1974.

[52]Atlanta Independent, 9 October 1924, p. 1.

[53]Atlanta Independent, 5 January 1925, p. 6; 26 February 1925, p. 5.

attended. The parts of the leading performers were especially well rendered, and the special quartet was heartily applauded.[54] By May of 1927 the Washington High School students presented a full scale opera in two acts entitled the "Yokohoma Maid" at the City Auditorium Armory.[55] Also by 1927, the school had established over twenty clubs in which most of the students took an active part.[56]

Although only three years old by April 1927, the school had already developed a reputation for excellence. In athletics, Washington High School's team won the Southeastern Basketball Championship. In the academic field of English composition, Eunice Strickland of the first graduating class won a $1,000 prize from a short story magazine of New York for the best short story. The title of her prize-winning short story was "What Wives Tell." The prize was won in general competition with a great number of contestants involved.[57]

The above activities indicate that the Washington High School students and staff were attempting to explore ways beyond the basic curriculum of establishing a sense of dignity, meaning, and self-worth. They also seemed to aspire toward excellence. These activities helped to create a momentum from within the school that seemed to demonstrate to themselves and their community that they were a viable educational institution.

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[54] Atlanta Independent, 26 February 1925, p. 5.

[55] Washington High School, "The Yokohoma Maid," a 1927 program booklet in the "Booker T. Washington High School" folder at the Atlanta Public School's Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

[56] J. H. Smith, "Historic Background of the Schools of Atlanta and the Development of High Schools," a mimeographed paper in the Atlanta Public School Archives, 1927.

[57] Ibid.

Another indication of a momentum from within the school was the "monument drive" of 1924 to 1927. This activity pivoted around raising seven to ten thousand dollars in order to erect a monument in front of the school in memory of the famous Booker T. Washington, the Tuskegee educator after whom the school was named. The idea for the monument was born in one of Washington High School's first Parent-Teacher Association meetings in October 1924. Up to that date, there were only three monuments in the entire United States that honored Blacks: the Crispus Attucks statue in Boston, Massachusetts, the Frederick Douglass statue in Rochester, New York, and the Booker T. Washington statue at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. The monument that the high school's Parent-Teacher Association hoped to erect was a replica of the Tuskegee statue.[58] The Parent-Teacher Association immediately gained support for this community project from civic, fraternal, religious and business groups. The Board of Education even commended the "colored citizens" for their "forethought and patriotism in this connection."[59] The Board approved the monument project on January 6, 1925 "with the understanding that the. . . Board of Education would not be responsible for the financing of the project."[60] A strong endorsement and plea for support went out from Editor Ben Davis of the Atlanta Independent. Davis was a long-time admirer of the late Mr. Booker T. Washington. In an editorial of February 12, 1925, which eulogized and glorified Mr. Washington, he said,

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[58]Atlanta Independent, 27 January 1925, p. 5; 26 February 1925, p. 1.

[59]Atlanta Independent, 15 January 1925, p. 1.

[60]Minutes, 6 January 1925.

> White boys and girls worship at the shrine in bronze of Grady, Gordon and Lee, and why shouldn't Negro boys and girls worship at the shrine in stone of Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass and other illustrious Negro characters? . . .Let Atlanta rally around the leaders of the monument movement and erect one worthy of the life and character of the illustrious school master . . . 80,000 Negroes in Atlanta contributing 75¢ a piece will erect a monument ($10,000). We have 100,000 men and women, white and black, in Atlanta who will vie with each other for this noble purpose.[61]

The monument project was equated with the total concept of community pride by Editor Davis in these words:

> The Atlanta Negro [compared to the white] is solely lacking in community pride. . . . There is not afoot a single project which has for its specific aims purely community welfare. The only thing of the kind in view is the proposed Booker T. Washington monument.[62]

The opening of the monument drive began on February 22, 1925 at Big Bethel A. M. E. Church. The drive included representatives from Morehouse College, Atlanta University, Morris Brown University, First Congregational Church, the Georgia Parent-Teacher Association, the Inter-Racial Committee of Atlanta, and one city councilman.[63] Washington High School students began their involvement in the fund-raising project by doing vaudeville performances and operettas in behalf of the monument drive.[64]

By January 1927, a sufficient amount had been raised so that a contract could be established with a New York artist, Mr. Keck. The bronze statue would be made in New York and shipped to Atlanta and mounted

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[61] Atlanta Independent, 12 February 1925, p. 4.

[62] Atlanta Independent, 19 February 1925, p. 4

[63] Atlanta Independent, 26 February 1925, p. 5.

[64] Atlanta Independent, 5 March 1925, p. 5.

on Georgia marble. It would be an exact replica of the Tuskegee model at only half the price.[65]

The monument was finally unveiled on May 20, 1927. An audience of 10,000 witnessed the ceremony in front of the high school. The monument was thought to be the first statue erected in honor of a Black person on public grounds in the South.

One of the two main speakers for this occasion was Dr. J. W. E. Bowen of Gammon Theological Seminary. The choice of Dr. Bowen was criticized by Editor Davis because Bowen had condemned Booker T. Washington in Washington's lifetime and was not in sympathy with Mr. Washington's philosophy of education.[66]

Only two weeks after the unveiling of the monument, the high school was involved in another kind of ceremony. This ceremony more closely represented the heart of the school and the reason for the school's existence. On June 4, 1927, Booker T. Washington Junior-Senior High School graduated its first class of seniors.[67] There is a numerical discrepancy as to the total. However, the number was between 116 and 145.[68] The list that states 116 graduates is divided into graduates of the "academic curriculum," who totaled forty-nine, and graduates of the "general curriculum," who totaled sixty-seven. Among the academic curriculum graduates, there were thirty-six females and thirteen males.

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[65] Atlanta Independent, 20 January 1927, p. 1.

[66] Atlanta Independent, 26 May 1927, pp. 1, 8.

[67] Minutes, 9 June 1926, vol. 14, p. 172.

[68] Atlanta Public Schools, "Booker T. Washington High School," a folder in the Atlanta Public School Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

Of the general curriculum graduates (emphasis on vocational skills and shops), there were forty-three females and twenty-four males.[69] The total number of females outnumbered the total number of males two to one. Between these two curricular categories, most students prepared themselves in general education, rather than preparing themselves for post-secondary training. The world of work seemed to have a stronger pull than college for most of the graduates.

This was the first Black public high school graduating class in the history of Atlanta. The dream of obtaining public secondary education for Black youth in this city had been finally realized. This graduating class represented the actualization of a fifty-five year old effort on the part of Black Atlantans.

The presence of Washington High School had a distinct impact on Black Atlanta's broader academic world in two ways during the school's formative years. On January 22, 1926 the Georgia Association of Negro Colleges and Secondary Schools was founded. It was formed inside Washington High School's building. A professor of Education at the University of Georgia was the primary sponsor. Representatives from various Black institutions above the seventh grade level were in attendance. Atlanta University's president, Dr. Myron Adams, was elected the first president of this association. This group met a second time at Washington High School on January 21, 1927 with representatives from six of the eight Black schools ranked by Georgia as above the high school level. This meeting also had representatives from ten of the

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[69]Ibid.

twelve accredited Black high schools in Georgia (only six were public).[70]

The opening of Washington High School had a direct impact on the five Black colleges of Atlanta during the high school's formative years. In the fall of 1925, Atlanta University began slowly to phase out its lower (junior) high school classes. However, the University continued to operate the Knowles High School until 1928 for the following reasons: 1) Atlanta University's Education majors needed a high school in which they could practice-teach; 2) many citizens of the community insisted on maintaining a private high school conducted under the auspices of Atlanta University; and 3) the Knowles Industrial Building was not being used for any other purpose and would create very little economic burden to operate as a high school. In 1928, Atlanta University became the first of the five local Black colleges to eliminate its high school program. Atlanta University worked out an arrangement with the Atlanta Board of Education so that its senior Education majors could observe and practice-teach at Washington High School under supervision during the 1928-29 school year.[71] The four other private high school programs closed within a few years, leaving Booker T. Washington Junior-Senior High School as the sole institution for Black secondary education in the city until the rise of David T. Howard Junior High School in 1929. The next Black public secondary school did not open until twenty-two years later.

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[70] Bacote, The Story of Atlanta University, pp. 172-173.

[71] Ibid., pp. 169-170.

Washington High School attempted to answer its mission to educate any Black youth in Atlanta who wanted a secondary educational opportunity. But the ominous problem of overcrowding and understaffing made double sessions necessary in the seventh grade after just one year. Also, the upper grades often had classes as large as 40 per class. Therefore, the quality and content of the instruction must have been hampered by the overcrowding and half-day sessions. Some Black Atlanta families continued to send their children to the five private high schools until those schools began to phase out, starting in 1928.

Racial inequality and discrimination definitely influenced the school's early history. This discrimination was evident by numerous acts, procedures, resolutions, and policies of the Atlanta Board of Education. The inequality was evident in offering Black Atlanta (one-third of the population) only one combination junior-senior high school when Whites had eight separate high school facilities; understaffing in the Black high school; large salary inequities between Black and White high school teachers; acts of omission of Washington High School in the School System's policy matters; and attempts to eliminate the night school program altogether.

Washington High School offered Atlanta's Black youth an education that had two specialty areas from which to choose: a) academic college preparation which placed special emphasis on foreign languages, English, Mathematics, Science and History; and b) general education which placed special emphasis on vocational skills of domestic arts, manual arts, bookkeeping, stenography, and the skilled trades and shops. Most chose the general education course of study. Washington High School's Night School offered Black adults everything from first through twelfth grade

courses.

The P.T.A. activities and the extra-curricular activities of students revealed that the school's administration, teachers, parents, and students sought to create a momentum from within the school community that helped them better perceive their own self-worth and self-esteem. A successful three-year monument drive by the Parent-Teacher Association along with various musical and dramatic performances by the students helped them to establish a self-definition beyond being "separate and unequal." However, none of these activities struck any kind of blow at the essential problems of overcrowding and understaffing.

The new Black high school had a profound impact on the Black and White communities between 1924 and 1927. In the White community, the opening of Washington High School produced resentment and became a bitter and important political issue in the mayoral Democratic White Primary of 1924. By contrast, in the Black community, the new school produced elation and it became *the* new gathering place for Blacks. In a span of three short years, the school became a junior high school, a senior high school, a day school, a night school, a college preparatory school, a vocational skills school, a trade school, a meeting place for professional groups, and a temporary home for students displaced by fire. The high school's students, parents, faculty, and even the building itself developed into a source of community identity. For Black Atlantans, the activities of the school became synonymous with the idea of "community."

It is difficult to assess from the primary sources used whether or not the school made a difference in the individual lives of Black

Atlantans. The fact that at least 116 youth graduated from the school's first graduating class in 1927 must have made some positive difference in the lives of those students and their families. A follow-up study of how those first graduates used their diplomas was the subject of a thesis written for Atlanta University by Miss Basoline Usher, the first Assistant Principal of Washington High School.

Booker T. Washington Junior-Senior High School, in its formative years, became the common ground for Black Atlanta. The children of Atlanta's Black educated elite mixed arm to arm with the children of the Black masses. The school became the catch-all, the new frontier, the grand experiment, the cure for Black Atlanta's ailments, the great hope, and the meeting place of lofty dreams and ugly realities. The cherished dream, though torn and very tarnished, had become a reality.

CONCLUSION

The story of the origin of public secondary education for Blacks in Atlanta is the story of inequality and injustice toward Black education in the New South. It is also the story of Black unity and challenge of these injustices. Atlanta, the state's largest city by 1900, lagged far behind smaller towns as LaGrange and Athens in establishing a high school for Blacks. Although Blacks had protested since 1872 about this gross omission in their educational progress, it was during the years 1917 through 1919 that the momentum of protest reached a climax. The great issue was the right to a quality and equalized public education for Black children. After a successful voter boycott of the polls in 1919, Blacks were finally promised a tax-supported high school out of the 1921 school bond appropriations. While the first public Black high school was under construction in 1922, the Whites of Atlanta could celebrate fifty years of public high school education for themselves and their predecessors.

The recommendations of the 1922 Strayer and Engelhardt Survey Report influenced the growth and development of the entire Atlanta Public School System for the next twenty years. However, this report included very little information about anticipated growth patterns for Blacks and where additional senior and junior high schools should be located for them. Instead, the Atlanta Public Schools built one combination junior and senior high school for all Blacks of the city

in 1924. It was overcrowded with youth of the city and state from the very first week. The overcrowding at Washington High School reached a crisis state before the Board of Education established a junior high and later a senior high at David T. Howard School. These were the only two high schools available to serve over 10,000 Black Atlanta youth until 1951 when the third Black high was built. By contrast, Whites, who were two-thirds of the city's population, had eight secondary schools from the 1920s up to 1951.

Washington High School was named in honor of the famous Tuskegee educator and "accommodator," Booker T. Washington. Although the school had been born out of political agitation, the Board named the school after a man who shunned overt political agitation as a viable strategy for Blacks.

Although they were surrounded by intimidation, unequal facilities, hostile laws, terrorism, and a White supremist philosophy, Blacks still asserted their right to protest for better school facilities. In the field of education, they had very little to lose and everything to gain. Within the span of one decade, beginning in 1917, they worked to secure and insure free secondary education for all Black Atlantans. The origin of Black public secondary education in Atlanta is rooted in the dream of mankind to be able to stand up and say, "I AM."

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